

Manuk Abeghyan

Armenian Folk Beliefs

**Translated from Armenian by Robert Bedrosian
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The transliteration used here is a modification of the new Library of Congress system for Armenian, substituting x for the LOC's **kh**, for the thirteenth character of the Armenian alphabet (խ). Otherwise we follow the LOC transliteration, which eliminates diacritical marks above or below a character, and substitutes single or double quotation marks to the character's right. In the LOC romanization, the seventh character of the alphabet (ե) appears as **e'**, the eighth (ք) as **e''**, the twenty-eighth (ռ) as **r'**, and the thirty-eighth (օ), as **o'**.

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Abbreviations for Armenian References

AU—Allahverdian, J. *Ulnia kam Zeyt'un* [*Ulnia or Zeyt'un*] (Constantinople, 1884).

AH—*Azgagrakan hande's* [*Ethnographic Review*], E. Lalayan, pub. vol. I (Shushi, 1895); vol. II (Tiflis, 1897).

HP'—Hovsepyan, G., *P'shrank'ner zhoghovrdakan banahyusut'yunits'* [*Fragments of Popular Folklore*] (Tiflis, 1893).

LJ—Lalayan, E., *Javaxk'i burmunk'* [*Fragrance of Javaxk'*] (Tiflis, 1892).

NH—Navasardyan, T., *Hay zhoghovrdakan hek'iat'ner, zruyts'ner, erger, aghot'k'ner, sovorut'yunner ev ayn* [*Armenian folk tales, sayings, songs, prayers, customs, etc.*] Books I-VIII. Books VI and VII also contain some material from my own collection.

ShV—Sherents', *Vana saz* [*The Saz of Van*] (Tiflis, 1885).

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SM—Srvandztyan, G., *Manana* [*Manna*] (Constantinople, 1876).

TT'—Ter-Aghek'sandryan, *T'iflisets'ots' mtavor kyank'e"* [*Intellectual Life of the Tiflis Armenians*] (Tiflis, 1885).

AHH—Alishan's *Hin havadk' kam het'anosakan kronk' hayots'* [*The Ancient Faith or Pagan Religion of the Armenians*] (Venice, 1895), served as a source for information about ancient Armenian religious beliefs. This is a detailed exposition of information on our topic culled from ancient and medieval Armenian sources.

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Armenian Folk Beliefs

I. The Sources, and a General Characterization of Armenian Folk Beliefs

[1] The study of Armenian folklore in Eastern Armenia arose parallel with the development of its modern literature, which is only a few decades old. The majority of modern Armenian authors in their literary creations interested themselves with topics concerning ordinary people's lives, and, as a result, such authors described folk customs, sayings, religious and even superstitious practises. Consequently, fairly rich material for ethnological studies exists within modern Armenian literature itself. Nonetheless, the study of folklore as a separate discipline dates from 1874. Its pioneer was Bishop Garegin Srvandztyan who, during the course of just a few years, published rich collections of Western Armenian legends, folk songs, folk tales, riddles, proverbs, customs, and superstitious practises. Others followed his example and, as a result, there is at present sufficient material available for a study of Armenian folk beliefs, even though such material is somewhat one-dimensional. This is the result of the collectors' unfortunate, unsystematic approach. Regrettably, much of the material still needs to be written down while a great deal of the rich material that has already been written, unfortunately, remains unpublished by the collectors. Books, especially those devoted to this subject, are often difficult of access.

In my present study I was, unfortunately, unable to avail myself of all the relevant published works. My principal sources were the following collections:

[2]

AU—Allahverdian, J. *Ulnia kam Zeyt'un [Ulnia or Zeyt'un]* (Constantinople, 1884).

AH—*Azgagrakan hande's [Ethnographic Review]*, E. Lalayan, pub. vol. I (Shushi, 1895); vol. II (Tiflis, 1897).

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TT'—Ter-Aghek'sandryan, *T'iflisets'ots' mtavor kyank'e"* [*Intellectual Life of the Tiflis Armenians*] (Tiflis, 1885).

In addition, I made use of *Sasna tsrer* [*David of Sasun*] the folk epic, in several variants published by G. Hovsep'yan (Tiflis, 1893), as well as the variant I published under the title *Davit' ev Mher* [*David and Mher*] (Shushi, 1889).

The value of these collections is only in the material they contain. Such collections have no scientific discussion of categorization of the prayers, songs, and other materials they contain. This is left to the readers. The two volumes of *Azgagrakan Hande's* [*Ethnographic Review*] do constitute an exception, however.

I selected much of the material for this study from the above sources and/or collected it myself in various parts of Armenia. I am not familiar with other studies or monographs on Armenian folk beliefs. One work, [3]

AHH—Alishan's *Hin havadk' kam het'anosakan kronk' hayots'* [*The Ancient Faith or Pagan Religion of the Armenians*] (Venice, 1895), served as a source for information about ancient Armenian religious beliefs. This is a detailed exposition of information on our topic culled from ancient and medieval Armenian sources.

Materials used but not referenced here will be indicated in the course of this study. In any case, we must note that certain materials were drawn from my own unpublished collections, which, to avoid repetition, have not been quoted in full. Much of this

material was collected in my native village of Astapat. A certain part of this material, of course, does not belong solely to this village and may be found also in the aforementioned sources.

One ancient Armenian source I made particular use of is [the 5th century] Eznik of Koghb's *Eghts aghandots'* [*Against the Sects*] (Venice, 1826). This also contains much relevant material about ancient Armenian folk beliefs. Eznik, especially in sections one (pp. 68-110) and two (pp. 149-187) of his work, refutes either native Armenian or foreign but already Armenianized folk conceptions—even though he barely mentions the Armenians directly. One must conclude that he is talking about the Armenians from such expressions as "they say" (*asen*) or "from asking some folk" (*vasn harts'aneloy omants' t'e'*), etc. Virtually all the practises that Eznik refutes with Biblical quotations may be found in the folk beliefs of today's Armenians. He writes (p. 111): "It is the duty of the Church of God to refute orally those who are unlettered and who stray from the truth, while those within the Church who have erred should be countered with Scripture."

There is no doubt that Armenian folk beliefs bear a Christian stamp before all else. However, an illiterate and unschooled people, as most Armenians are, living in close proximity to illiterate and unschooled [4] nomadic people, strongly retained their own ancient customs. As a consequence, many features of ancient pagan beliefs have been preserved in today's folk beliefs as survivals of the past, although they are on the verge of disappearing. This is especially true in the lower levels of society, such as in the practises of old village women. We must add to Christian and pagan elements Islamic elements which have affected the Armenians after centuries of association with, and domination by, Arabs, Persians and Turks. Thus we have the constituent components of today's Armenian folk beliefs: Christianity, paganism, and Islam. Yet despite its large influence on Armenian manners, customs and even on the language, Islam had an insignificant impact on folk beliefs. Thus we are left with two fundamental elements in Armenian folk belief, Christian and pagan.

The pagan dimension, which constitutes the major part of our investigation, represents a substratum of mythology which virtually all the world's peoples likewise possess. This reveals itself through a belief in spirits, worship of the dead, mythical conceptions of physical phenomena and natural objects, as well as in belief in demons and magic.

The conceptions of Armenian folk beliefs, as well as many of the actual myths and legends themselves, of course, may also be found among many other Indo-European and non Indo-European peoples. Armenian beliefs and the beliefs of other peoples, to a large extent, may truly be described as being shared by all humankind. Some beliefs may be specifically Armenian. However, most similarities must be explained as transfers or borrowings. Just as obtains today, there have been numerous peoples who have been

Armenia's neighbors or who have also dwelt on the lands of historical Armenia. All of them, naturally, have had some impact on Armenian customs, traditions, and folk beliefs. [5] Thus it is difficult to differentiate whether a particular practise has been borrowed from particular foreigners either in antiquity or more recently.

Armenian folk beliefs must be considered to include everything which is widespread, even if it has a foreign origin. But it is essential to differentiate those elements of folk belief which have not taken root and which, in the popular consciousness, are considered alien.

Language serves as one means of differentiating foreign elements from those which are native Armenian or have been Armenized. As an example, we observe that old Iranian loan words were Armenized very early on, yet the many Arab, new Persian, and especially Turkish loan words, on the contrary, though in use among the people are regarded as foreign. This is true certainly among the more conscious strata of the society, if not always among the common folk. Thus the [Iranian] word *t'onir* (stove, oven) is already regarded as Armenian while the [Turkish] word *o'jax* is not. In common usage, often *t'onir* or *krak* are used in place of *o'jax*, and often the expression *krak anel* ("to make a fire") is used as a substitute for *o'jax anel*. Everything connected with similar non-Armenized words are excluded from our study unless they are part of generalized folk beliefs. As an example, the cult of the hearth fire and the sacredness of the hearth, customs which are very widespread among the Armenians, are certainly not borrowings from the past few centuries even if Armenians may refer to the fire-place as *o'jax*. Similarly we cannot accept the proposition that prior to adopting the word *o'jax*, the Armenians did not have such stoves, since the *o'jax* commonly referred to in Armenia is of two extremely simple types. [6] The first type—which has two or three stones in proximity with a cauldron placed directly atop them and a fire lit underneath it in the space between the stones—is not the sacred hearth. The second variant of this *o'jax* sees the cauldron placed on a tripod in a traditional raised fire place, with the fire kindled underneath the tripod. In some locales, though this is not so widespread, this type of hearth is considered sacred as is the accompanying chimney or flue which must be very ancient judging from its unique construction. Only the old hearth [*t'onir*] whose name was borrowed from the Iranians (1) and which was in use in Armenia already in the 5th century, is universally considered sacred. It is constructed in the center of the home, in the ground, and is seen as equalling the church in sanctity. Close to the hearth dwell the spirits of the home, probably the spirits of the dead, to whom sacrifices are tendered during major events in a family's life such, as we shall see, during marriages. Thus, we may not entertain the idea that the cult of the hearth had anything to do with the importation of the word *o'jax* from Turco-Tartar tribes.

We have deliberately not made use of fairy tales in our present study with the aim of

further isolating foreign elements which have been borrowed relatively recently. This is because such tales pass quite easily from one people to another and especially since much of what appears in such tales does not relate to folk beliefs, despite the fact that some folk tales may and do contain some legitimately ancient material. Occasionally, however, we will introduce folk tales solely for the sake of comparison, and when their substance may be confirmed from other sources.

Since we want to provide an overview of Armenian folk beliefs, we shall draw parallels from the beliefs of other peoples, especially to illuminate some dim survivals of ancient ideas and practises. There is one thing which cannot be overlooked in this: namely, the important influence of Iranian practises on the pagan religion of Armenia [7], an influence which remains quite noticeable in the beliefs of today's Armenians.

Central to Armenian as well as Iranian folk belief is the conflict between the good light (*bari loys*) and the evil darkness (*mut' xawar*), or the contrast between the luminous, radiant spirits—many of whom appear under Christian names in Armenia—and the evil *sev dever*, the black demons [*dev/dew*, *daeva*] who wander about invisibly or visibly in various incarnations in the air, water, earth, and human dwellings. An unending struggle takes place between the spirits which are luminous, friendly, and protective to people, and those spirits which are black, inimical, hostile and harm-causing. All the good things in life—the light of the day, happiness, joy and so on—derive from the luminous spirits while all the evils—death, darkness, sickness, misfortune and so on—are produced by the wicked demons of the night. For this reason, indeed, the dark smoke-like demons are feared but they are not worshipped. Folk really only worship the Light, which is the supreme good. The goodly "sole Lord God" who governs the world, and gave to humanity its luminous faith and laws of justice also is considered as the Light. However, he seldom interevenes directly in human affairs. In his service and under his command are bands of angels and hosts of saints, Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and others. All the saints and blessed ones are considered to be made of light, while the angels, ordinarily, are seen as fiery beings. Of course, much has been transferred from the pagan gods to the saints and to the angel Gabriel.

[8]

II. Belief in Spirits and Worship of the Dead

Spirit as Breath

Belief in spirits, a widespread phenomenon among primitive peoples, still occupies an important role in the religious conceptions of modern Armenians. It should be particularly noted that in the different stages of the development of Armenian folk beliefs, the belief in spirits and in the next life was continual and persistent. Thus, among other conceptions, we find one of the primitive association between spirit/soul and breath, in which the spirit is regarded as a being made of wind or air (2). As an example, it is a customary expression to say about the spirit: "Spirit is nothing but breath. You die when you breathe your last breath." Thus in Armenian, the words "breath" (*shunch'*) "spirit" (*ogi*), "soul" (*hogi*), and are often treated as synonyms. For example, in [the writings of the 5th century Armenian author] Eznik we read under "Breath and Body": "A person's spirit is not made of matter" (p. 178). Nonetheless, the idea of spirit and soul in the sense of breath appears already in Eznik (p. 90): "...because the name of spirit and of wind is the same in Hebrew, Greek, and Syriac. You will discover that this is the case in Armenian also, if you examine it. When someone who has been bothered by someone else says, 'He does not let me breathe, he does not let me inhale,' he makes clear by that expression that he refers to this air which we are always taking into us." In modern Armenian it is more common to say [for "to breathe"], *shunch'* ["breath"] *ar'nel* instead of *ogi* ["spirit"] *ar'nul*. Nonetheless, in both old and modern Armenian the word *ogi/hogi* ["spirit"] is the word used in expressions such as *yogwots' hanel* [9] (deep inhalation and exhalation, sighing), *hogi p'ch'el*, "to give up the ghost/to die", etc.

Vision and Dream

Although the soul animates the body, it is independent of it. Sometimes the soul separates from the body and, for a short or long period, absents itself and wanders about. At such times the body lapses into unconsciousness or fainting and lays panting for breath, waiting for the soul to return into it. Usually they say that when the soul separates from the body in this way it travels to the next world. Among the Indians when the soul (*manas*) leaves the unconscious body it goes to Yama, ruler of the dead in the next world, and "sees first-hand various panoramas in the next world" (3). Similarly, among the Armenians, the soul flies to heaven or hell and sees many sights as, for example, how one's friends in the next world are being tormented in hell or experiencing joy in heaven amidst the *immortal flock* (*anmahut'ean hoti me'j*) and the lights. The soul even sees and talks with God in heaven (*AH*, II, p. 186, *SGB*, p. 37, *SM*, p. 88). When the soul thus separates from the body, it is called "having a vision (*tesil gnal*)" (4) and many people say that they have had visions of this sort. The dream, however, is not considered a vision even though here, too, the soul comes forth and wanders. Such dreams are regarded as omens or foretelling when angels, saints, the souls of dead or living folk appear in them with the aim of predicting something. From this stems the customary

expression: "Tonight a dream came to me (saint Karapet/John the Baptist, an angel, or my late father) and said," (5) (*HP'*, p. 40; *SGB*, p. 138).

Forms of the Soul when It Leaves the Body

When the soul exits through the mouth of a dead body, it continues its separate life invisibly. [10] It can, however, assume a visible aspect. Generally, the soul is pictured as having human form or a corporeal form of some sort, sometimes only slightly smaller than the actual body and thus all souls, those of adults as well as of children, are pictured as being of their own size (*AH*, I, 317). The soul may frequently manifest itself in the form of an animal or even of an inanimate object, such as appearing covered in the cottony cloth which is used to swaddle babies, or appearing as a sphere of light. The most common animal manifestation is as a white bird, if the deceased was a blameless person, or as a black bird if the deceased was a sinner. In the same way that among the Indians the coming of ancestors in the form of a bird is accepted (6), among the Armenians the souls of the departed are seen as birds, flying hither and thither into yards, perching on trees (*AH*, II, 185), where they are frequently seen. This is especially the case for the souls of children who also are depicted as seated on the fabulous **incense tree** [*tsar' xnkeni*] in Paradise.

Ghosts and Their Evil Influences

Souls which have departed from their bodies frequently appear along the roads in diverse, changeable forms appearing especially to travelers. The forms assumed include those of the cat, black dog, wolf, bear, and ass. Travelers are terrified of them. Souls may even take on the aspect of naked people who jump onto the backs of those passing by or hop onto the horses of those riding. People actually sicken from fear of such ghosts. Ghosts enter cities and villages by night, circulate around outside homes, and then return to their graves at dawn. Only Turks, unrepentant sinners, malefactors, and suicides will always take the form of such phantoms (*SM*, 82, H. Kostanyan, *Shiraki legondanerits' ev zhoghovrdakan kyankits'* [*From the Legends and Folk Life of Shirak*] (1896), p. 71).

Spirits which have separated from the body can do much more than play malicious pranks of this sort. They may themselves appear as evil entities who can, as in the beliefs of other peoples, do harm [11] by entering into a person or attacking that person (7). Diseases are still explained as the results of penetration by evil spirits. Consequently, people are often frightened of the sick, especially when the latter are unconscious and/or

swooning and thrashing about in pain. "That is the evil spirit which is tormenting him," they say in this case meaning by "evil spirit" a soul that has become separated from the body of a deceased person and lies in wait for a living person. Survivals of such concepts may be found throughout Armenia. For example, when someone in a household gets ill especially right after the death of an extremely old, incapacitated man who had not been well treated, it is thought that the cause of the illness was the deceased himself, and that he will not rest until he brings along in his wake between one and seven other family members. Thus they would open his grave, cut off his head—as is done in the case of the bodies of returning ghosts (SM, p. 85)—crush the head, or drive a nail through the head and the heart. They may even slice off a part of the deceased's heart and give it to the sick family member to swallow with some water as a cure (AH, II, 153, 184). This is the survival of an old belief which has been preserved among primitive peoples. Of course among the Armenians this custom is rarely encountered and its sense is not fully understood by those practising it. Bastian writes: "The motivation here is self-preservation which prompts the living to keep at bay the dead (who may make their presence known by spreading disease and causing pain). If flattery of the deceased does not work [a feast as the 'most honorable ceremony of burial'] then violence is tried (tight binding, dragging, spearing, etc.) (8)." [12] Superstitious Armenians who believe that a particular spirit which has separated from a body wishes to injure them, acts to neutralize any evil effect that spirit might have, practising violence against the corpse or swallowing or eating the deceased's heart since that was regarded as the seat of the soul—thus to devour and destroy the soul itself as an individual existence altogether, or render it harmless. This custom is still observed by many indigenous peoples (9). The fear of souls separated from the corpses is so great that when a corpse is taken from the home, the last in the procession as though following after an enemy throws pots about and as they break cries out: "Go and do not come back again," (10) because should the spirit return, it would only be to do damage (11). Thus the Armenians are greatly frightened by corpses and cemeteries. Few are brave enough to go into a cemetery at night. Frequently one may observe superstitious practises whereby people try to ward off the evil influence of the deceased from themselves or others. Thus the priest who goes at the head of the funeral procession may not shake his head from side to side, or, they may tie the toes of the deceased with cord (AH, II, 179, 181), presumably in the hopes of preventing them from moving about freely. Until a peasant has been buried, the villagers should not wash their hair or do laundry because of the presence in the village of [beings come to take the dead such as] the Soul-Taking Angel or *Grogh* who might do them in, trample on them, or cause them to get sick (AH II, 184). Such sick people are called *hreshtakakox* ["trod on by an angel"] or *groghi zarkats* ["struck by the soul-taker"] (AM, p. 69) or *mer'elits' vaxts'ats* ("frightened by the dead"), while the illness itself is simply [13] called *vax* "fear." Anyone can fall prey to this illness who is around a corpse or a fresh grave. In folk belief, the soul-taking angel often gets confused with the dead. All this, whether it concerns the *vax* or "trod on by an angel" or the cure for disease called "struck by the

soul-taker," clearly shows that the principal cause of the illness is not attributed to a demon but to the deceased's spirit. As an example, in my native village and in other places (AH, II, 183) on the day after a burial, when the ceremony called *ayg* ["morning"] is performed, into a trough dug on the new grave, water is poured which is immediately drunk, the face is washed with it, and it is smeared on the breasts as a cure for "fear" which people can contract unawares from the deceased. Now if the person is truly sick and the cause is laid to the soul-taking angel or to the deceased, then the cemetery is visited again for a cure. The patient will bend over the grave of a person who died violently or without taking communion (the most dangerous) while water is poured on the neck so that it fills a trough dug on the grave. Then the sick person drinks this. Sometimes the water in a pan is left on the grave an entire night and then on the following day the patient drinks the water and smashes the vessel. Sometimes they remove the headstone, dig a hole in the soil, and place there an egg which has been cracked with a nail. This is covered with soil and then water is poured over it, and then this is drunk (compare AH II, 145, 183, 244). The meaning of these ceremonies is not fully understood by those performing them. Without a doubt these are survivals of sacrifices which people offered to the dead when they suspected that they were being pursued by them. With the aim of making peace with the spirits of an evil spirit separated from its body, the spirits are offered food and drink. These practises may be compared [14] to the Indian customs of offering sacrifices to the dead (12). "Three pits are dug and *darbha* grass is scattered in them. Then the sacrificer must hold the pan and going from right to left sprinkle water on the *darbha* grass in the eastern pit giving the name of the Father", etc.

Spirits

These opinions and fears about ghosts, which are survivals of old beliefs, clearly show that souls detached from their bodies are transformed into evil demons and evil spirits and become objects of dread. Indeed, souls and spirits not only have the same name [in Armenian] but are regarded as beings composed of the same substance. In ancient Armenian the words *hogi* [soul] and *ogi* [spirit] actually are the same word and are used without distinction in the sense of spirit, as in Eznik (pp. 84, 90, 91). In *modern* literary Armenian the word *hogi* is used in the sense of "soul" while *ogi* is reserved for "spirit," however, this is a recent distinction influenced by European languages; otherwise they are used interchangeably. In the dialects there is no differentiation. Spirits are classed as "good" based on their type. For example, angels, saints, venerable souls, etc., while the "evil" ones are demons and satan, etc. Just as the language does not distinguish between "soul" and "spirit" so the general conception does not distinguish their material essence. Souls, as we have seen, are accepted as being made of air/breath and/or of wind in the

same way that spirits are, whether angels or evil spirits (NH, VII, 24). Folk say, about disease brought on by the influence of demons, "a wicked breath has touched him," or "an evil wind has fallen upon him," and by "breath" and "wind" are meant evil spirits.

[15]

Souls as Light, Spirits as Fire

In addition to the characterization of souls and spirits as breath and wind, there is another perception which is more widespread and more living. According to this, the soul is composed of fire or brightness (13). At the moment a person is born, this [light] descends from heaven and lives as a vital principle on the left side of the body or in the heart. As long as it is inside the body it has an indefinite shape, or is a ball of light. It is only among children and only for the first ten years that this soul remains white and luminous. For adults, the more they sin, the more their souls dim and blacken.

Spirits are perceived as fiery (*hreghe'n*) creatures derived from fire [NH, VII. 24]. This perception is so widespread that the word fiery (*hreghe'n*) is taken to mean "angel" (14). Good spirits, either male or female, also take the form of animals.

This belief is quite ancient and appears already in Eznik (page 91): "Angels and demons and human spirits...do not take their natures from the wind or the fire. For if they came into being from the nature of the wind and the fire, then they too would justly be termed corporeal and not incorporeal." Elsewhere (p. 92) he writes: "And because of the expanse and the speed alone, the angels, demons and spirits of men are said to be made of air, just as on account of intensity the angels are called luminous," etc. However, this is merely Eznik's own interpretation because people in his time believed that fiery angels could marry human women (Eznik, p. 91).

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Armenian Folk Beliefs

The Moral Moment and the Two Guardian Angels

Along with the conception of souls and spirits as entities composed of light and fire, [16] there is a secondary division of souls, seen as bright, radiant and white, from souls which are seen as black, dark, and shadowy; as well as a distinction between spirits—fiery and bright—from spirits which are black and smokelike. Because of such attributes, moral qualities are ascribed to these groups. All radiant souls are just, while all black ones are unjust; all radiant fiery spirits are good and protect humankind, while all black spirits are evil and work to harm people.

Justice and injustice appear only in [human] activities. In order to record a person's deeds, at the time of one's birth, together with a luminous soul, two angels descend from heaven (for Christians) (NH, VII, 25). As regards the second angel, sometimes folk say that it descends only at baptism. Thus Muslims have but a single angel. One of the angels, a protective angel sometimes called the "Writer" [*Grogh*], sits on the person's right shoulder and records the good deeds. The other angel sits on the left shoulder and records the bad deeds (AH, I, 318; II, 186).

Perceptions of the guardian angel differ. Often the guardian angel who records the good deeds also leads people on the path of justice, while the other angel is considered evil and regarded as trying to lead people into injustice. Thus they are styled the "good angel" and the "bad angel." On other occasions (NH VII, 25) the two angels are perceived as two guardian angels, one protecting the soul, the other, the body. After death, the first one leads the soul to heaven while the second one guards the grave.

Death

Evil spirits may cause a person wickedness and sickness, but not death. These are tormenting spirits but not demons of death. Among the Armenians, a perception prevails that death [17] occurs either due to predestination, or, independently of the numerous effects of evil spirits and events, by the will of God. God has in his service an angel of death or certain spirits for taking a person's soul. Thus when the preordained last day arrives, or when God wills it, the soul-taking (*hogear'*) angel appears and the person surrenders his soul to him. If the individual is unwilling, then the *hogear'* extracts it forcibly. Consequently, the angel is also known as soul-remover (*hogehan*). The soul-taker is frequently imagined as an angel, also known as *Grogh*, who travels all over the world implementing God's command. Therefore it is considered sinful to curse *Grogh* (AHH, p. 227). Often the archangel Gabriel appears as the the soul-taker or *Grogh*. Thus in one song in a folk epic we see (HP', p. 4 ff.) death perceived as a struggle between the dying person and the angel of death, Gabriel.

He is Gabriel the Brave,
Who has one foot in Heaven and one on the Earth.
He kills both the poor and the rich,
And does not halt even before a king.

The soul-taker does not remove the soul at one go. First he removes it [from the feet] to the knees, then up to the heart, then finally to the throat whence it is removed through the mouth. Thus the soul, which is perceived as a reflection of the person, is found dispersed throughout all parts of the body. According to another perception (AH, II, 178; NH, VII, 24), if the person was just, then his soul is removed gracefully by [one of the] two angels which sit on his shoulders. This type of death is seen as very easy: the good angel gives to the deceased a red apple or a bouquet of flowers and invites him to a place of joy as though to a wedding (NH, VII, 25), and the man dies in great bliss, talking and laughing without experiencing any suffering. [18] He hears the sounds of his deceased relatives (AH, II, 179) calling him and saying: "Come on, come on, it's good here." And the deceased answers back: "I'm coming, I'm coming." On the other hand, when the man is unjust, his soul is taken by the wicked angel who has recorded his evil deeds. This type of death is very painful. The person does not want to die and is tortured as he struggles against *Grogh*. The latter mercilessly attacks the dying person until finally he runs his sword through the dying person's side and the soul comes out. The man dies immediately after this without the means of expressing his last wishes.

The Soul's Journey to the Next World

In Armenian beliefs, as in the beliefs of many other peoples (15), prior to burial of the deceased, its detached soul remains near the body (AH, I, 317, II, 185). Despite this even

after burial a person's soul may linger around the cemetery and in the vicinity of the person's home for an entire year (16). It is for this reason that the *hogehangist* ("soul's rest") ceremony for the deceased is performed only once a year. After this one year period, the deceased is regarded as long dead and already gone to the other world (17).

In any case, this seems to be a survival of an ancient perception since according to the most widespread current view, the soul begins its journey to the place of judgement right after burial or early in the morning of the next day (18). This journey lasts seven days (AH, II, 179). The two guarding angels accompany it. The wicked angel, aided by other demons attacks the good soul and tries to dominate it, but the good angel with a fiery sword keeps him back and defends the soul (NH, II, 25).

[19]

Judgement of the Soul

Life in the future world is customarily associated with the dawn. "Mazdean resurrection," Darmesteter writes, "is a twilight," whereas "the Vedic dawn is a daily resurrection" (19). Since there is such a strong feeling among the Armenians that the black of night is a dangerous and deadly hell, the Armenian dawn is not only a daily repeating resurrection but also the time of the judgement of the soul. Almost all morning prayers contain such beliefs.

It became light, it became light
The light is good.
The sparrow is in the tree.
The hen is on the perch.
Let the idle stay sleeping,
You active folk, arise and get going.
The gates of Heaven have opened.
A golden throne is placed there,
Upon which Christ sits.
The Illuminator stands by.
He holds the golden pen in his hand.
They write the fate of the great and the small.
The sinners cry.
The just play. (TT', 26)

Another prayer says:

The gates of Paradise opened

and the righteous were exalted.
The sinners knelt and wept
having no provisions [good deeds] to take along
to continue over the Hair Bridge,
to answer Christ.
Nor is there any way back. (LJ, 12, I)

As among the Iranians, the Armenians believe that judgement takes place near the Heavenly Gates which are located in the East. They believe that each day at sunrise the doors are opened (*Handes grakanakan ev patmakan*, 1888, p. 372) [20] and thus during the whole time of the morning prayers for the deceased, judgement of the souls is taking place near the Hair Bridge. The actual judgement itself is pictured in the same way by the Armenians and Iranians (20). A person's good and bad deeds, which were recorded and kept by the two recording angels (*groghs*), are weighed in the scales of justice. This scale corresponds to the scale of the Iranian Rashun the Righteous, the spirit of justice. Following the verdict, the good—those whose good deeds outweigh their bad ones—proceed to Paradise, crossing over the Hair Bridge without danger. The wicked go to Hell since for them the bridge is exceedingly narrow, nor can it withstand the weight of their sins. For them, the bridge breaks and the soul falls into the River of Fire which flows under it. This river divides Paradise from Hell. As for those whose good and bad deeds are equal, they go to and remain in a place behind Paradise which is located between Paradise and Hell (AH, II, 185). The evil angels, especially the evil recording angel, offer up indictments against the soul while the good angels defend the soul. This is especially true of the Virgin Mary who comes forth as an intercessor. Who is the judge in this court? Among the Iranians it is Mithra, god of the morning sun who is the foremost judge. Among the Armenians it is Christ who reposes on the rising golden sun. This judgement must be differentiated from the Last Judgement.

Cult of the Individual Dead

Worship of the dead begins immediately after death. All departed souls, especially the souls of elderly folk, require special care in the first days after death and throughout a full year. For this reason, among the peasantry it is considered a great misfortune to die without having children (21). [21] It is considered an even greater disaster to die in foreign surroundings where there is no one to provide the type of consideration that the dead require from the living. One may observe traces of several levels of development in the care taken with the dead. Bastian writes: "Initially what are demanded are material enjoyments," that is the soul needs something to eat and drink (22). We have already described the feeding of the souls of people who have died from disease. However, *all*

the dead require food. Consequently, immediately after death bread is placed on the deceased's chest (AH, II, 179), while in some places there is a custom of placing a holy wafer in the mouth and incense in the nostrils (AH, I, 310). Below we shall introduce other types of solicitousness. Most of these methods have the aim of easing the journey to the next life and the improvement of the soul in the afterlife. For example, everywhere in Armenia the corpse is washed with holy water; the very next day after the burial the deceased's clothing is washed in the naïve belief that thanks to this practise the soul is further cleansed of sin and thus will depart to its destination spotless. The washing of the home is followed by a religious ceremony which has the same intent and is called *anbitsk'* ("spot/blemish cleaning"). The cleaning and purification of the body affects the soul's cleaning and purification, and thus the corpse is wrapped only in a white sheet. No other color is permitted. If the deceased's age is greater than ten years, the place where the body is washed is lit continuously with candles or oil lamps for eight days so that the road by which the soul travels to the afterlife is illuminated (AH, II, 179). According to an ancient conception, the place that the soul is journeying to is dark. Thus, immediately after the corpses [22] are washed, two candles are placed in their hands, so that in the other world they will be able to recognize their relatives and friends (AH, II, 179). Specific ceremonies are performed prior to burial, the day after burial, as well as on the seventh and fortieth days after burial and on the anniversary of the burial. On such days it is usual to take food and drink to the cemetery and place it on the grave, mourn for the deceased, eat, drink, and depart, leaving the leftovers on the grave.

As was already noted, the souls of the righteous are pictured as shining and white while the souls of sinners are black. Thus the righteous souls are called *lusahogi* (radiant souls). To possess a radiant soul a person of course must have done good deeds. Among these a special role is given to acts of charity toward the poor, and the righteous dead are also styled *oghormatsik* (merciful). There is also a widespread belief that black souls separated from the body become more luminous and bright thanks to good deeds done by the relatives of the deceased for the deceased, as well as by the prayers of relatives especially in the first days after death. Thus the deceased wants to have children and wants to die in his homeland in the environment of his relatives so that they pray for him after death. The prayers for the deceased are short but, as is the case for all prayers, the power is in their repetition. Each time they are recited, when the deceased is mentioned the person praying says: "May God have mercy on his soul" , "May his soul turn to light", "May God illuminate his soul", or simply "radiant soul."

Hogehats'

This custom—"bread for the soul"—is still widespread in all parts of Armenia. It is a responsibility which relatives must perform for their deceased members either at the

cemetery or in their home. [23] At this ceremony they eat, and also drink a "cup for the soul" (*hoget'as*) or "cup for mercy" (*oghormat'as*) by which they ask God to make the soul of the departed more radiant and more white each time they drink. Such intercession for the soul of the deceased is not limited to a single *hoge hats'* observance. There are also multi-day observances of this ceremony, including, in some regions a seven day observance.

Worship of the Dead

Five times a year the ceremony known as *mer'elots' hishatak* "remembrance of the dead" is held on the day after each of the five great feast days. Just as among the Iranians, when the *fravashis* return from the other world to this one during the Hamaspatamdaya (23) so among the Armenians the souls of the deceased descend from the sky to earth on Saturday, the day before the celebration of the feast (AH, II, 185). They stay in the vicinity of their graves or at their relatives' homes. The eve of this remembrance must be marked with incense and candles, which are considered offerings to the spirits (SHH, p. 344). Incense is pleasing to the spirits since it is in Paradise where the incense tree grows.

Everywhere in Armenia spirits are also worshipped on the eves of other festivals and every Saturday night (AH, I, 318). Usually at the hearth of the house, incense is lit and prayers are offered, or else fire is placed in a dish which is then sprinkled with incense and then is circulated throughout the house, to every corner, into the stable, and anywhere else that the spirits of the departed are supposed to be.

[24] There is another custom, keeping a light lit for the dead for the entire evening so that the dead spirits of that house may enter it. Should they see that the house is dark, they will spit into the house from the skylight and depart, cursing. On these evenings people do not drink water in the dark because they believe that they might thereby deprive the thirsty souls of the departed by drinking their water (AH, I, 318).

The most solemn rituals for the dead are conducted at the cemeteries, since the spirits' favorite venue is the area around their own graves. People actually feel the presence of the spirits of their dearly departed. The deceased observe this and are pleased that they are still remembered and that their relations have priests bless their graves. To please the spirits of their forebears even more, people bring wood and incense to the cemetery and burn some at the head of each grave.

The ancestors remain on earth for three days. On the third day, after blessing their descendants, they fly to heaven again. The spirits of those whose relatives who do not recall them, curse such relatives as they sadly depart (cf. AH, II, 185). Spirits visit their

relatives also on other days as well and perform a variety of services. In particular the spirits of fathers help their sons. They are also subject to a special worship, their graves are considered holy, and people swear by their spirits or their graves, e.g., "my father's soul as witness" or "by my father's (or, grandfather's) grave" which are standard formulae for oaths. Also in time of need people will call on the spirits of their parents for aid, and receive it.

[25]

The Relationship between Ancestor Worship and the Stars

Just as *fravashis* were equated with stars among Iranians (24), so among Armenians there was a close connection between spirits and stars. Stars are the lamps of the spirits (*Handes grakanakan ev patmakan [Literary and Historical Review]* 1868, p. 372). The gleam of a star is related to the splendor of the gleam of the spirit belonging to it—the purer the soul, the brighter the star (AH, II, 219). Not only the moral quality of the soul, but the physical condition [of its owner], its life-giving force, may be gauged among Iranians and Armenians by the term *jan*, the fifth and lowest of the spiritual powers (25). Thus, when the hero is in trouble, his star dims; when he fights with someone, that person's star is also fighting its opponent star in the heavens ("David and Mher", from the folk epic *David of Sasun*, 1889). A common curse is "may your star dim and go out" addressed to someone you want dead; or, "his star fell" or "his star went out," for someone who has died.

The brightest stars—which never fall—belong to the righteous and spotless who sit on these stars in heaven. These souls constitute the first important group. Just as the spotless male and female Iranian *fravashis*, are equated with the stars, so the souls of the dead are at the same time viewed as protective spirits and are appealed to as such. Among Armenians the fixed stars are considered protective spirits equivalent to guardian angels and are revered. "Oh stars, great and small, be our helper and protector and together with the angels Gabriel and Michael, free us from all tribulations, evil people, and evil times" (SM, p. 308). People also swear by the stars.

[26]

Heaven or Paradise, and Hell

Armenians and Iranians have the same conception of Heaven and Hell as diametrically opposed places. Heaven is perceived as a city, sometimes styled the "Priceless City." The Iranian outer heaven is called *Asman* (which is encountered in the Artsakh dialect in the

sense of sky/heaven), and has a protective palisade made of blue stones, as protection against evil spirits (27). Corresponding to this conception, the Armenian heavenly city is protected by a tall stone wall with bronze gates. These gates are further fortified with spikes so that the "evil eye" and all evil spirits be driven off, and be unable to get inside. The heavenly city itself is one luminous temple or a glittering palace with lofty arches made of stones of rainbow colors. It is the "home and place of immortality." Everything there is light and gleams wondrously. No darkness or cold exists there. On the far side of this heavenly structure stretches the "paradise of immortality or light" which contains various types of trees and flowers which are always in bloom and give off an "immortal, paradisaical fragrance." However, the soul's favorite tree is the incense tree. There too grows "the flower which never fades," the rose and dog-rose, as well as other flowers and fruit-giving trees. At the foot of the trees flows a milk fountain which is also called "the fountain of immortality."

Dwelling in this luminous paradise are the angels and those enviable people who have become angels. On their heads are unfading haloes and they are seated on chairs of sunlight at an open table full of immortal food known as *anoshak* food, [page 27] or in the ancient Armenian perception "ambrosia" or the "fruits of immortality" (28). These blessed folk dine on fruit and drink the waters of immortality from the Milk Fountain. Thus the senses of sight, taste, and smell have no reason to be dissatisfied. The organs of hearing, too, are not deprived of pleasure, since the blessed and the angels are always offering up choruses in praise of God, Who sits on a golden throne in a temple of light amidst shimmering lights (29) (cf. SGB, 39; SM, 90; SHH, 319). Such is the reward which the righteous receive immediately after dying, as remuneration [28] for their good deeds.

However, there is another type of payback, in Hell, reserved for sinners.

Paradise is located near a large, bottomless sea, which separates it from the rest of the world (30). A River of Fire flows in front of the Gates of Heaven, and suspended over the river is the Hair Bridge. On the far side of the River of Fire, facing Heaven, is Hell, the most horrifying and eternally dark place. Like the ancient abyss of the Sardaramet (*sandarametk' andndots'*), Hell is a bottomless abyss extending under the earth. It contains seven floors and is like a heavily secured dungeon which confines wicked black spirits and guilty foul-smelling spirits (AH, I, 317) who, immediately upon death, are handed over to countless devils. Flames are burning everywhere in ovens and hearths, producing an almost tangible thick dark smoke which makes the dark even more tormenting. In the light of the fire one can see how the poor souls are tortured, how they wear iron shoes and have mouths full of worms. In one spot a satan is beating them with a lead goad, in another spot another satan is heating to red-hot an iron skewer which he burns their ribs, and in a third place another satan is ripping off their flesh with

pliers. Still other souls are cast up to their necks into large cauldrons and cooked. A fiery dragon with seven heads opens its enormous jaws to swallow a soul. It breathes fire and sears the souls who are fleeing in horror before it, however, the only path open to them leads to the Hair Bridge suspended over the River of Fire which separates Heaven from Hell. [29] They barely put their foot on the bridge when it breaks from the weight of their sins and they fall into the River of Fire. They are again subjected to torments until God finally pities and illuminates them (SM, 89; AH, I, 319, II, 186).

Of course, these perceptions of Heaven and Hell are principally Christian, although Muslim influence is undeniable. Certainly there is material here which is even older. For together with such loan words as *dzhoxk'* ("hell") and *anoshak* (in the next world) and others, the Armenians received from the Iranians their beliefs about Heaven and Hell. See also the major role of the Hair Bridge.

Manuk Abeghyan

Armenian Folk Beliefs

III. Light and Darkness

Night Mothers

The dark of night is perceived as the action of evil spirits, of Hell itself; while the light of day is from the effect of the good celestial beings or of luminous Paradise.

The Night Mothers appear as the personification of darkness (SM, p. 87). They are old witches/seers (*vhuk*) who hold black snakes in their hands. They are enemies of the sun and, from the time of the world's creation, they have chased after the sun, never able to reach it. At night from under the mountains they rise into "our world", trying to catch the sun, but by this time the sun has already set. Then all of them blow simultaneously and darkness envelops everything or "darkness falls" and covers the entire world. At this moment the aforementioned old women run about here and there in groups—to the mountains, the forests, hamlets, cities, villages, and homes—believing that the sun might be hiding there. [30] But since they do not find it in any of these places, they look underground, getting there via their usual access routes, dried wells and fountains. Just as they have sunk into the ground, in the East the dawn starts glimmering, and the sun comes up from under the ground.

Night Mothers, in addition to being the mothers of darkness are, simultaneously, the mothers of evil and destruction. If they ever spot the "face of the sun" then not a single person on earth would remain alive, because in that case the Night Mothers would devour everything with their snakes; that is to say, with darkness, and everything would be destroyed. Fortunately, however, they never do see the sun, and the harmful "evils of the night" are visited solely on human beings.

Evils of the Night

Snakes appear as the most prominent of the symbols of dark evils, in the same way that Ahriman himself is pictured in the form of a snake. For darkening the world, he covers it with animals "biting, poisonous reptiles, snakes, scorpions, toads, to the point that there is no free space for K'arvantar" (31). These creatures of Ahriman, which also include ants, are doubles for the snakes (32). We find all of them in today's Armenian folk beliefs, as evil night animals which pursue humans, particularly at night, either by themselves or in conjunction with snakes. Ants and toads are no exception. Few people dare to touch toads which are regarded as loathsome, unclean creatures. People are frightened when they see a toad in twilight or in the nighttime. In one wedding song, which calls on the holy Illuminator [Gregory] to bless the groom, the toad is equated with the snake (SHH, p. 339) [31]:

He it was [Gregory] whom they put into a pit
which was filled with snakes and toads.

The toad (*gort*) is also regarded as a disease-causing *dev* (demon). It causes warts (*gortnuk*) on the hands (AH, II, 243) and so cannot be killed with a rock (Au, p. 107). Instead, when one sees a toad especially at night, it is necessary only to spit on the hands and feet (AH, II, 243), by which it is believed, it is possible to protect oneself from the effects of all types of evil *devs*. The toad may also cause a person's teeth to fall out (AH, I, 362). With this in mind one needs to shut one's mouth immediately upon seeing a toad during the day. The same holds true for lizards. Ants are not as harmful as toads, although they are occasionally called "satans" and are regarded as the source of skin disease, which is named after them *mrjmuk*. There is another disease named after the snake, *odzik* (AU, p. 93). At nighttime along with these evil creatures are other poisonous and harmful animals which try to enter houses, just like thieves and robbers: the wolf, scorpion, all biting reptiles (33), ghosts (AH, I, 370) and other *devs*, and also the "midnight sea", *i.e.*, the darkness of night. Just as among the ancient Indians, darkness, in its entirety is considered a sea capable of drowning people (34). After sunset all types of activity are curtailed, since with each step people are frightened, believing that evil spirits are present everywhere, in the air, water, and on the earth. During the daytime evil spirits are underground, and for that reason one may not pour boiling water on the ground because it would sink down and burn the feet of the evil spirits' children. [32] A superstitious Armenian, in general, does not pour water on the earth in the evening because evils everywhere are close to surface of the ground (HP', 65, AH, I, 326). Some of them are out walking, others are seated at table enjoying themselves, such that the pouring of water might disturb them. In such a case the evil spirits seek vengeance (HP', p. 65, AH, I, 326). At nighttime it is impossible to strike the floor with wood, sweep the house, or clean the stable because one could accidentally touch the evil spirits. However,

if one is forced to sweep at night, first the tip of the broom is burned with the aim of chasing away the evil spirits in advance. At nighttime it is impossible to go out with the head uncovered, because evil spirits could strike the head. It is also dangerous to drink water from a vessel at night particularly from streams or rivers since the evil spirits there could strike that person or enter that person's body via the water (cf. AH, I, 326). [If one has no choice] a knife with three blades or a piece of iron must be put into the water. The power of evil night *devs* extends to things which are used, and consequently after sunset salt (AU, p. 101) and fire are not changed nor is the table cloth shaken out (AH, I, 360), since doing these things causes salt to lose its taste and the house can lose its amiability and prosperity.

Sleep itself is also regarded as an evil thing (35). The bed is viewed as a grave and sleep as death which binds not only the physical body but the soul as well (LJ, 8, II, III, 7, I, 9, VII). They also even believe that sleep is a black *dev* called Lord of the Eyes (*ach'k'eri paron*) (DT'. 78) or *Mrap'* ("nap", "Morpheus"). His presence causes sleep. Sleeping folk are said to be in the embrace of Morpheus.

Prayer as a Means of Protection or Healing

There are certain prayers which are recited by people that have the character of spells and are directed against the baleful influence of the *devs* of the night (36). To the present among Armenians there is a widespread belief in the efficacy of prayer directed against evil spirits. Saying a prayer or a few lines of it often largely garbled and not understood already starts persecuting evil spirits. Repetition of the prayers increases their power and influences the status of souls found in the otherworld. Thus, for example, at the end of a prayer these lines are added:

And if you willingly recite this
Your sin will not be remembered at the Judgement. (LJ, 8)

or:

Whoever repeats this (prayer) three times
Your sin will not be remembered at the Judgement. (from my collection)

or also:

God's light will triumph.

These prayers are recited early in the morning while washing and dressing, and in the

evening before going to bed. Prayers are also uttered on different occasions, accompanied by making the sign of the cross, such as after yawning and sneezing, as it is believed that evil spirits may thereby enter a person's body or that the event was somehow caused by them (AH, I, 326). Eznik (p. 176) also writes about this when he says "It is the same with things which seem to have no clear cause such as sneezing, tingling of the tongue, ringing of the ear or tickling of the throat... [they are not from some evil spirit but from a natural instinct]."

Subsequently we will describe the prayers recited when burying teeth and nails. There exist too some ancient prayers or spells—indeed, it is difficult to differentiate prayers from spells—directed against the diabolical effects of certain harmful ailments such as warts (*gortnuk*) [34] (NH, VI, 146), skin rashes/diseases *mrjmuk* (LJ, 6, V), and fainting (*t'aluk* or *getni kaluk*) (HP', 76), which are caused by evil spirits of the ground. There are also charms against cataracts *ach'its' hati* (amaurosis), fever, and so forth, and against wolves, snakes, scorpions, the evil eye, and evil beings (*alk'*). Later we will return to some of these prayer-charms or spells. Here we shall examine those prayers directed against the spirits of the night.

Evening Prayers and Defenders of the Home

Several prayers are said when the door is closed for the night in the belief that thanks to them the house will acquire the withstanding strength of iron and its supports will become like steel. There are two protective entities—appearing under Christian names in this case—guarding the door and the skylight with sword and shield. Similarly, the protected house is compared to a heavenly temple or to paradise where Christ or Mary spend the night.

Our home is the home of the Lord
Whose walls are like iron
Whose columns are like steel
Christ (or someone else) guards the door
A sword keeps the door closed
Saint Ohan (or someone else) is on the roof
His shield guards the skylight
Whoever comes to the door is turned back
Whoever comes onto the roof is turned to stone
Oh Mary, are you there too?
"I have a knife with three blades/nails
One is for the false satan,
One is for the wild beast,

The third is to dispel all evil."

(cf. LJ, p. 11 ff. I, II, III; SHH, 341; SV, 77)

Prayers for Sleep; the Succubi/incubi (*tarp'oginer*); the Flame of Truth

Flame is considered a sacred thing which people swear by and which has the same prophylactic effect against demons as sunlight. Consequently, when extinguishing the flame of a torch [35] special prayers must be recited to eliminate the baleful influences of evils in the house.

Light is extinguished

Evil is vanquished

...

Three angels descended from Heaven.

One for my soul

One for my sun

One has come

To vanquish evil.

(LJ, p. 9, IX; SHH, 341)

The *xpiliks* are evil spirits which come and sit, whispering, on top of sleepers, suffocating or hurting them. There are also evil spirits which harm the sleeper's soul, kissing them on the lips with the aim of making love. We shall revisit the topic of such male spirits, the loathsome *alk's* (incubi). Here we would like to make a few remarks about the female *devs* of this type (succubi) who have intimate relations with men while they are sleeping. We do not know if they had a specific name. The word *druzh* (AHH, 218) found in old dictionaries is defined as "a harmful *dev*," which shows that belief in the evil spirits known as *druzh* existed among the Armenians. Regrettably we do not know if this word was used in this specific context or not. However in modern folk beliefs we encounter female demons equivalent to the Iranian *druzhās*. Belief in them is so great that certain types of evil beings, *devs*, *k'aj's*, and others in certain places only appear as females (NH, VII, 25). Sometimes, they even have children. "According to the *Vendidad*, men who, in the course of the night involuntarily pollute themselves [have nocturnal emissions] thereby become incubi for the *druzhās*, women demons of evil and pollution."

[36] We find the same beliefs among the Armenians. "They get their children from the sleeping man. They devilishly trick the sleeping man into having sex with them and thus

fathering children. All these types are female" (NH, VII, 29). This night trickery is called *satanaxabut'yun* ("Satan's deception"). Without a doubt the word "Satan" has emerged from the old name *druzh*. The Armenians had such belief already in the 5th century. Eznik, in demonstrating that various types of *devs* do not exist, writes: "Frequently [Satan] in the form of a woman deceives men and tricks them while they are dreaming. Sometimes he returns to male form to cause [similar] transgressions with women" (p. 178).

To the present, erotic dreams are considered great "soul-losing" sins. For this reason in their evening prayers people call on special protective spirits to defend them while sleeping, perching on their shoulders or sitting in front of them. Ordinarily Mary and also Jesus appear with them. The former is truly the ruling mistress against these evils and has the title of "smiter of evil (*ch'arxap'an*).\" She simultaneously concerns herself with sleep:

Light is extinguished
Evil is vanquished
Mary (or Jesus) with face veiled
Surrounded by angels
Has descended from Heaven
And has entered the home of cross-worshippers.
My Lord, where do You go?

Mary (or Jesus) after descending, replies:

I have a blazing fire
I have a flaming censer
Every strand is radiant.

(LJ, 7)

Mary, with these fiery, flaming rays of light substitutes for the light which has been extinguished. Thus she (or Christ) in prayers is called the "Lamp/torch of Truth (*chrag chshmarit*) and is appealed to:

Oh, mother of the Lord, preserve me,
...
May evil not come upon me from the walls
[37] May the lip-kissers not come upon me
Lo, I am entering the grave of sleep.
It is you who makes me sleep and you who awakens me.
Lead my poor soul from the night of darkness

Into the morning light.

(LJ, p. 8, II)

The Flower of Sleep and the Spirits of Sleep

The "flower which never fades" (*ant'ar'am tsaghik*) ("amaranth") is used as a means of protection against succubi and incubi. When people lack such a flower, they pray to the "Flame of Truth" asking that the copper gates of Elijah's paradise be opened with a key and that the "flower which never fades" be plucked in order to be placed under the sleeper's pillow (38). In other prayers it is said that Christ, riding on a horse, goes to the "priceless city," that is, to paradise in order to pluck the "flower which never fades" and put it under the pillow when sleeping (cf. LJ, 12, III, 13).

However, peaceful sleep and sweet dreams are also attributed to the influence of beings known as "fiery maidens/girls" (*hregghen aghjikner*) who live under the bed and in dark corners. They care about the peaceful sleep of the house's inhabitants, and perform a variety of sleep-inducing acts such as closing the eyelids, stroking the forehead, relaxing the chest, heart, and liver as a result of which the sleeper will enjoy good and peaceful dreams (SM, p. 88).

The Morning Star and the House Rooster

The beginning of daylight is heralded by the "star of light," the planet Venus, which is also called *Arusyak* ("Dawn"). As precursor of the sun or the dawn, Arusyak is styled the "bringer of light" or "bringer of dawn." Arusyak is also a girl's name, while Astghik is the name of a deity. According to a superstitious belief (AH, II, 243), unless Arusyak sees it, the serpent [of night] has not really been throttled. As such, it is only Arusyak who kills the serpent of the night. With Arusyak's appearance, the "thief's hour" (*goghu zhame*) [38] has arrived when thieves, robbers, and *devs* begin to depart (SM, p. 40). After this, there is not so much to fear as there was during the night. Everywhere, in house and field, a vibrant life is becoming manifest.

The second herald of day is the rooster, the "reviver of the dead of night" (SM, 319). First the heavenly cock crows, after which the angels commence their songs of praise in paradise. When this is heard by the earthly rooster, it awakens humankind and blesses the creator. The earthly rooster also sees how each morning the doors of Heaven are opened (*Literary and Historical Review*, 1888, p. 372). For that reason at the time of sunrise it the more frequently repeats its sound.

The rooster commands a certain respect because of its ability to wake people, as well as for its role as a holy sacrificial animal (39). Even the power of expelling the spirits of bad diseases is attributed to its cry. It is seen as a protector of angels who ascend to Heaven when people go to sleep and return at dawn. The rooster greets them with its crowing (cf. AH, II, 242). The rooster also sees the *Hogear'* (AH, I, 359) and all the evil spirits (AH, I, 275, 329).

Dawn

Although nothing is known about worship of the Dawn Star, dawn itself does enjoy such reverence. People swear by the "good light" and by "the blessed dawning of morning."

In their prayers, they appeal to the dawn as to a divinity. "Oh radiant dawn, let the good morning light all the needy, strangers, and everyone as she calls on us to rise." Or "O Dawn, wet with dew, bring us a good day and a happy fate" (SM. p. 308).

These are ordinary prayers recited every morning at dawn [39] while making the sign of the cross. In Armenian, the East is also called the "place of prayer" (*aghot'aran*) since the Armenians pray facing East. The word also means "dawn" and "prayer time," since folk usually pray early in the morning and in their prayers they appeal to the dawn more frequently than to the sun.

The belief in dawn as a virgin is very common. Indian "*Ushas* is dawn, *yuvatih* is a young girl, *arepasa tauva*, with a pure/unblemished body" (40). In Armenian folk belief the "holy and immaculate virgin" is the personification of dawn. She appears as a goddess of light and in morning and other prayers (SHH, 343) is called simply "light" or "the blessed light." She is also called the Rose Maiden (*vardakoy*s) (LJ, 3, I). In spirit and body she is a spotless flame. In heaven she stretches across the fiery sea, or at dawn she ties the arcs of light together. But she herself also is that arc of light which spreads, she herself is the fiery purple sea which is appealed to in prayer (LJ, 12, I).

Dawn destroys the evils of the night.

Light spread and filled everything
And chased *devs* and demons.

Every day she herself, resident of heaven, conquers *Txurk'* ("Sorrows") or hell, the goddess of the night. She saves humanity from the grave of death and the fetters of night and brings it life, joy, and knowledge.

Light came and brightened it...
The doors of Paradise were opened
The gates of Hell have been destroyed
And my soul, which was bound, has been freed.

(LJ, p. 7, I)

[40] Another prayer (from my own collection) says:

The light bringer brought the light
Every village rejoiced
Mary is seated at the blessed altar
With divine words in her mouth
Those who repeat this prayer three times
Will not have their sins recalled at the Judgement.

In Armenian "light" is frequently used in the sense of "joy." Folk give thanks for weddings, successful births, and on other such occasions in the following manner: "Light of your eyes" (*ach'k'd loys*), that is, "I wish you happiness." The one receiving such good wishes replies: "May you stay in light (joy)." Light is also used in the sense of knowledge, while darkness is equated with ignorance.

The virgin who awakens sleepers in the morning with her light is especially giving humanity knowledge as does the Indian *Ushas* who not only dispels darkness, but is herself "a goddess who wakes people... and is perceived as a goddess who brings people knowledge" (41). Early in the morning, before sunrise, the Armenians appeal to the dawn in which, as they believe, the virgin is seated:

Mother of God, you stand as an arch
for your only son.
Take my limited knowledge
And give me your understanding
Mother of God, arch of Light
The fiery sea, for me...
Enlighten me with your luminous ideas
And turn me from my sins.

(LJ, p. 12, I)

Another prayer says:

It has become light, light is good

The sky is a fiery sea
The blessed virgin Mary sits at the holy altar
The word of God is on her lips
Greetings, Mary, you who are a virgin
In spirit and in body, you are my light...

[41] Variation:
[You are the arch of Heaven
You have a golden girdle]

You are an arch of radiant light
I have kept my soul for you
Give me power
And I will go and do many good deeds
May you lead my soul into the kingdom.

(cf. the variants HP', 77, LJ, p. 7, II, 8, IV)

Thus people want the Rose Maiden to guide them in their daily activities and direct them to be worthy of eternal happiness. This thought about the next world is very natural if we recall that the judgement of souls takes place at dawn.

The Sun

In Armenian folk beliefs the sun and the moon are personified beings and are worshipped. Folk bless and swear by their names and pray to them. The sun, initially was perceived as a radiant stone (42), as the derivation of the word *aregak* from *arev* (sun) and *akn* (precious stone) shows. This conception is recalled in the widespread expression *akn u aregakn* which is used in fables to characterize the glowing beauty of the "fiery maidens."

Nonetheless, the view of the sun as a wheel is very much alive (43). "The sun has the shape of the wheel on a water mill or a globe, which turns as it moves forward. As the water gushes from the mill, so light rays are emitted by the spokes of the sun (SGB. 109). This is an old belief which is found in Yeznik (p. 217) and according to it magicians can bring down the sun, moon and stars. In reports of such magic, the sun is fiery and round and comes down like a wheel of a cart (SM. p. 126).

More often, the sun is a young man, who is also good and light-hearted. But sometimes the sun is perceived as a wicked old mother [42] through whose son's light (life) the

heavens and earth are lit. The sun dwells in a palace which is located in the East at the end of the world where there are no people either white or black nor are there any birds. To go to this place one must don iron shoes and take an iron staff in hand. The sun's palace is to be found at that spot where the shoes wear out and the staff breaks. Here there are twelve courtyards in succession built of blue marble and vaulted. Neither tree nor grass, neither bird nor any other type of being is found here. During the day, when the sun is on its daily travels, great silence rules in this place. A million stars rest here. Their peace is disturbed only by the fountains which gush in each of the yards. In the middle courtyard alone there stands a golden pavillion. Near it is an open bed made of pearls. Seated on the edge of the bed amidst the lights, is the sun's mother who is waiting for her son. And behold, he returns flaming, tired from his daily travels. The stars stand up and greet the sun and his mother, and then ascend to the vault of heaven. The heroic sun bathes in a pool of clear water. The mother hugs her son and removes him from the water, transfers him to the bed holding him in her arms, and then gives her breast to him, the ever-young hero sun. The latter rests up so that early in the morning on the next day he can resume his journey (SHH, 258 ff; AH, II, 217).

In accordance with this perception of the sun's course, the Armenians, instead of saying that the sun has set, say that the sun has gone to/entered his mother (*areve" mayr e' mtnum*), while they sometimes say about daybreak that "the sun has arisen from his mother's breast" (*areve" mor tsots'en elav*). At night they swear: "Only the weary sun knows that" (TT', p. 198).

This same conception is found among Slavic peoples [43] who say that in evening the sun is going to bathe or to be with his mother, that is, to sink into the sea's embrace (44). Among Armenians, the sun's mother is usually twilight (occasionally, dawn). Nor is the perception of the sea as the sun's mother foreign to them, the sea, where the evening sun goes to rest (AH, I, 348). However, due to the fact that Armenia does not border the ocean, the sun usually bathes in any body of water near his mother. In the Lake Van area, people say that as the sun goes to his mother through that lake, he bathes in it and then, cleansed, rests from his daily journeying. They believe that his bed is on the lake's floor and rests on foam, and that the bed's curtains are snow white and rose-colored clouds (SBG, p. 107). Before sunrise angels dress the sun in fiery garments and make the bed. When the sun washes his face, mountain and valley are sprayed with dew. Birds come awake from their sleep and start chirping. First, from over a tall mountain in the East, the sun king's twelve bodyguards appear. With their glowing wands they touch that mountain which, with all the other mountains, bows its head before the sun king. At this moment the sun suddenly shows his golden head surrounded by flaming locks, greets all of nature, and ascends to the vault of the sky (SBG, p. 109).

The moment of sunrise has been an object of veneration since remote antiquity. Today,

too, in certain places there is a custom of going on one's knees and and praying: "O, divinely radiant sun! May your feet rest on my face! Preserve my children," etc. (AH, II, 216). The above is a remnant of the ancient sun-worship which Moses of Khoren (II, 77) mentions as being practised by the ancient Armenians along with the moon cult.

[44] The sun's mother, and especially the sun, bestow beauty on girls. The sun's mother frequently appears in tales and riddles. She wears golden raiment and her eyes flash like the rays of the sun. In one tale (*Aghbyur*, 1883, No. 1) at twilight she gives a girl beauty and clothing woven from the sun's rays and adorned with precious jewels. She blesses the girl and then says: "Now I shall go. My son is waiting for me." She disappears and the sun sets. The sun is regarded as perfect beauty. A beautiful girl is always compared to the sun. The latter, whenever he wants, can endow girls with beauty, and for that reason girls request beauty from him, performing the following ceremony. They gather leaves of the wild apple tree and wrap them in the leaves of *shgabi*. These leaves are then placed under the stars during the night, and the next day, before sunrise, they are used as henna to dye the hands. They extend their hands to the rays of the rising sun and cry out:

Sun, sun
Take your henna and give me glory.
I shall go and marry.

(*Handes grak. ev patmakans*, 1888, 372)

We have already mentioned the Night Mothers and their snakes as pursuers of the sun. Among the Armenians, as among many of the world's old and new peoples, there still exists traces of a widespread belief that during an eclipse the sun and the moon are engaged in a battle against the *devs*, especially against the "great dragon" who wants to swallow them. Since they believe that the end of the world has arrived they are extremely frightened. To chase away the devils they make a good deal of noise, banging against each other such vessels as copper pots, cauldrons, and kettles. They remind one of church bells and they continue clanging until the sun or the moon, with human help, vanquishes their enemies. [45] In a similar fashion people believe that making noise during their daily chores is a means of countering evil spirits. They believe that at the noise they gather to punish those making the clamor.

Later we shall describe the attack made on the sun during storms. Here let us relate the plots of two tales told about the sun. According to one of them a hunter called Sunset Lad had gone for three days without catching any game. Angry because of this, at sunrise he wanted to shoot the sun in the forehead with an arrow to bring it down from the sky. At dawn, just as the hunter was poised to raise an arrow to his bow, he suddenly beheld the sun's visage. The boy's face and eyes were suddenly struck with a fiery slap.

The sun's flaming hand grabbed the boy by his hair and hurled him to some deserted spot. Because of the sun's curse, the boy had to be dead during the day so as not to see the sun's light, and only come to life at night. With the aim of saving him, the hunter's mother travelled to the West, to the queen, the well-disposed mother of the sun, so that she might receive from her as a medicine some of the water from the fountain that the sun-hero had just bathed in (SHH, p. 256 ff.). In another tale we learn about a boy who says to the setting sun: "Beloved sun, wait just a bit until my mother finishes knitting my socks and until I put them on. Then set." And so, the sun waited. When he returned home later than usual, his mother—who appears here as a wicked old woman—asks him why he is late and then curses the lad who caused this, with a result that the Sunset Lad was dead during the daytime and only came to life at night, while the mother was never able to finish the socks.

The sun's mother can also turn people into stone by her curses (AH, II, 218).

Manuk Abeghyan

Armenian Folk Beliefs

III. Light and Darkness (continued)

Moon and Sun

The moon and sun are sister and brother, the moon being the sister. [46] It is believed that formerly the moon-sister travelled around with her brother the sun. However, because of her beauty, an evil eye was put on her and she developed smallpox. For that reason she beseeched her brother to conceal her from the eyes of those who would behold her. With this, the sun could both protect his sister from the evil eye and at the same time avenge her (*Handes grak. ev patmakan*, 1888, p. 372). The sun did as she requested. For that reason, too, it is impossible to look at the sun. Out of shame, his sister only crosses the sky at night when the whole world sleeps and no one can see her. However, since some folk do not sleep at night, she frequently appears with her face covered by a veil of clouds. The Queen Moon does not travel alone. Thousands of star-virgins are her escorts and servants (SGB, p. 107). Because the Armenian language lacks grammatical gender, sometimes the sun is described as the sister, while the moon is called the brother. In this situation the tale described above is as follows. The sun, as a girl, shies away from going out at night, while during the day she is embarrassed to be seen by people. For that reason, her brother selected the night for himself and left the daytime for his sister. He also gave her a handful of stars to hide her from the eyes of those wanting to see her (*Aghbyur*, 1887, No. 5-6). From that day forth, the sun travels about mounted on a lion which holds a great sword in one paw as protection against evil spirits (AH, I, 348, II, 217) (45). The brother goes out at night. Aside from the brother, no one gets to see the sister's face. Folk say that the dark lines visible during full moon are the moon's mouth, nose, and eyes. However, usually these lines and spots are explained by saying that once when the mother was kneading dough she got angry at her son and slapped his face with her hand. This left traces of dough on his face (AH, II,

[47] Sometimes the moon and the sun are considered siblings, other times they are thought of as lovers. When they encounter each other on their journeys, the boy (the moon) falls into a swoon and darkens. Tied around his neck is a bag filled with blood which he occasionally hurls at the sun's neck, as a result of which the sun is extinguished (AH, I, 348).

The Moon

The waxing and waning of the moon is explained by the fact that the moon grows each month, just like a newborn baby. At full moon the child is fully grown but after this, he increasingly grows old and small until finally, like a white-haired old person, he goes to his mother in paradise and gets renewed. And then he returns as a newborn boy. For this reason, the first day of the moon's first quarter is called the moon's birthday.

Worship of the moon is more widespread than worship of the sun. Usually people pray to it only at new moon (46). When they see it for the first time, they cross themselves and wish to see a person regarded as successful so that they will themselves enjoy success for the entire month. They also look upon money made of metal or gold believing that the moon will give them gold. Some folk kneel before the new moon and pray: "...Oh moon, newly born from your mother, your foot is upon my face, protect my children" etc. (SM, 105, AH, II, 216).

We shall now provide three examples of rhymed prayers. In one we read:

Moon, dear moon, may you live long!
 Your foot is upon my face.
 You are yellow, like a yellow book (47)
 An apostle upon the sea [Page 48].
 You depart an aged white-haired old man,
 And return a young king.
 For your young life I would sacrifice myself.
 What is the news from Paradise
 About the souls of my father and mother?
 Forgive my sins.
 May bread be cheap,
 And may death be dear,
 And may there be peace in the land.

The other prayer (TT', p. 16) is as follows:

New Moon, you are are merciful,

I am a sinner, you are a king.

Give me success in the work I engage in,

And my strength when I finish."

The new moon is also regarded as a bringer of health. For example, as a god of light, it heals warts brought on by the evils of the night (see above) (AU, p. 106). At the time of the moon's "birth" folk turn their faces toward it, lift some soil and put it on the warts and pray (NH, VI, p. 146):

New Moon, new king,

I am an old man, you are a king.

What news do you bring from the other world?

New Moon, New Moon,

Warts have arisen to eat me.

You eat the warts, so they do not eat me.

The moon is not always a bringer of health and happiness. In other verses, sometimes it is helpful, other times not. [49] The good and bad qualities of the day are based on it. This difference between days called *orahmay* ("day oracle") or *lusnahmay* ("moon oracle") though not natively Armenian was spread throughout Armenia since ancient times. In his homily "On the charms of seers" (*Vasn hmayits' dyut'akanats'*), John Mandakuni writes that certain days—Wednesdays and Saturdays—or certain days of the lunar cycle are considered unlucky days. Presently, Monday instead of Saturday is regarded as unlucky. On unlucky days people do not initiate important endeavors such as sowing, harvesting, weddings, or travel.

The moon has an especially harmful effect on small children and babies (AH, I, 274). To protect children against such harmful effects, a mother will show them to the moon and say: "Your Uncle (mother's brother), your Uncle!" With the same aim, the child's mother and father at the time of the new moon, on Wednesday and Friday nights, go up on the roof. The father puts the baby on a shovel and gives it to the mother, saying: "If it is yours, take it to yourself; if it is mine, give it back to me." The mother lifts the shovel with the baby and in a similar fashion returns it to the father.

The Milky Way

One story about the stars must be noted especially. We learn in a well-known and ancient tale that during a severe winter the Armenian god Vahagn stole straw from the Assyrian god Barshamin. The traces of the straw are the Milky Way (*Ananiayi Shirakunwoy mnats'ork' banits'* Petersburg, p. 48), which today is called the road of the straw thief or the straw road, and it leads to the heavens. In the tale's modern recitation, the names of Vahagn and Barshamin have been forgotten, like the names of all the pagan gods, though the nature of the story remains the same.

"It happened that the god of other beings sent its servants to steal straw from the god of our world. [50] The angels of our god shot arrows and killed the thieves. The stolen straw fell across the face of the heavens and remains there."
(SGB, p. 108)

In some variants of this legend (AH, I, p. 349) in place of the gods, a godfather and godmother appear. The latter steals the straw, but since there is a hole in her apron, the straw falls out and creates the road of the straw thieves.

The Milky Way is also explained as a tear or column in the heavens.

IV. Belief in Fate

The Stars

Belief in fate, as among the ancient Iranians is bound up with the starry sky and apparently is a borrowing from the Iranians or bears Iranian influence (48). We do not want to include here a discussion about belief in the 12 constellations and the 7 planets, the *axtark'n* and *apaxtark'e*", and their good and bad effects, since this conception is not widespread among the people.

People see the stars as celestial lanterns which, as is expressed in one riddle, are like torches placed high and wide, providing light without oil, hanging in the heavenly temple which was built without pillars or beams (SV, I, p. 142). Some of them are good, others, bad. As the vault of heaven spins about, the stars appear and then set (49). Everyone comes into this world under a particular star.

[51] That star under which a person stands when being born becomes his destiny ("the star of fate or happiness"). If a person's star is good, then he is lucky, if it is wicked, then he is unlucky. People often say "the star is with him," meaning that he is lucky. Not only happiness, wealth or poverty, but death, glory, strength, wisdom, indeed, all good and

bad is connected with the star. Sometimes a star will give wisdom or the power of prophesy to another person. For example, a shepherd who drank water from a ditch learned from a dream that he had become a saint because he drank water that a star's rays had fallen on (AH, I, 438). With that, he acquired the gift of prophesy.

The Wheel of Heaven

In contemporary Muslim Iran, fate is connected with the heavenly wheel (*ch'arx*) and the planetary sky (*felek'*) (50). The Armenian word fate (*baxt*) which is old and often used, is an Iranian loan word (51); however, in Armenian dialects *falak'* or more precisely the expression *ch'arxi falak* is used in the sense of the "wheel of fate." The latter is generally perceived as being separate from heaven itself. The best example of this is found in an episode in the folk epic *Sasna Tsr'er* [*David of Sasun*] concerning the epic's mightiest hero, Mher (SGB, 134). He and his horse are sequestered to a mountain cave in the vicinity of Lake Van. People believe that at that place all the treasures of the world are there accumulated with him. There too stands the *ch'arxi falak*, the universal wheel of humanity, the wheel of fate which, while constantly spinning, apportions human destiny. Mher is always watching this wheel. When it stops, he will emerge from the cave and destroy the world. The door of the cave, which is a rock covered with cuneiform writing, remains shut the entire year, but once a year [52] on the night of Christ's Ascension, it opens for a moment. Whoever seeks out that moment and enters the cave can take away as much money as he wants. This conception of the wheel of fate is quite widespread, nor is it always conceptually separated from the heavens or connected with Mher.

Time

Thus among the Armenians, fate is connected with the turning of the wheel of heaven. "This motion is nothing other than the passage of time" (52). For this reason among the Iranians the perception of fate is tied with the perception of time. Eznik wrote about the Iranian Zrvan: "Zrvan is a name which translates as fate or glory" (Eznik, p. 113). Minokhired wrote: "In this world everything occurs because of fate, because of time, because of the supreme decree of time which exists of itself" (53). In Armenian folk beliefs sometimes time is considered to be the most powerful and the cause of all things. Thus one proverb (NH, VII, 82) states: "Everything depends on time though time depends on no one thing." This is almost the same as what Minokhired said about time. Armenian *zhuke*" or *zhuk*, and *zhamanak* ["time"] (54), like the Iranian Zrvan, is not a creation of the luminous Ormazd or the dark Ahriman but reigns as a supreme power over the regular course of daylight during the day and darkness during the starry night.

Time, like Zrvan (55), has the appearance of a white-haired old man who sits on a lofty mountain (*Aghbyur*, 1887, No. 5-6). In such tales, [53] the mountain always substitutes for heaven. *Zuke*" holds in his hands two balls of thread, one white, the other black. These symbolize day and daytime and night and nighttime of the sky. He rolls one or the other of these balls down the mountain in turn. On one side of the mountain he rolls one ball down, while he rolls the other ball down from the other side of the mountain. When the white ball rolls down, it becomes light and the sun rises; when the black ball rolls down, it becomes dark and the sun sets.

Such a perception of time also is found in Armenian fairy tales. A favorite motif involves the travelling of a hero to see Time (*zhuk*) with the aim of lengthening the day, or, more often, the night, during which the hero needs more time to complete numerous miraculous tasks. In one tale (SHH, 151) we learn that "he departed and met an old white-haired man sitting on the top of a mountain holding a ball of black thread in his hand. There was also a large white ball next to it. The hero approached him and asked, 'Who are you? What kind of a ball is it that you have there?' The old man replied: 'My son, I am Time *zhuk ev zhamanak*. When I release the black ball, it becomes night. When I release the white ball, it becomes day.' Then little Mirza [the hero] saw the black ball, rushed at the old man, stole the ball and let it roll down the hill. And he said: 'Begin again to unwind, let the night be extended. I have much to do.'"

Destiny

The moment a person is born, all the major events of his life are determined by God or Fate, in heaven or on a mountain top. They are recorded by *Grogh* ["the Writer/Scribe"] on that person's forehead. Predestination is called *chakatagir* ["what is written on the forehead"] or *hramank'* ["commands"]. Such beliefs are quite old and are encountered already in [54] Eznik who comments on them in connection with ideas about human destiny (Eznik, pp. 153, 158, 161). Lines visible on the skull are considered *chakatagir* which, for humans, is unreadable. The decisions of fate cannot be changed. Its main provisions are:

1. Death. When and how a person dies is meant here. The total number of days in a person's life is determined either in heaven or on a mountaintop. This is reckoned as follows. Everyone has a pot there in which a drop of water falls each year. When the pot is full, that person's days are fulfilled and he will die (AH, II, 178). According to another version, at birth each person gets a pot filled with sawdust shavings. This pot empties itself gradually, until nothing remains in it and the person dies. Hence the expression: "His sawdust is not yet emptied," *i.e.*, his end is not yet come (AH, I. 308, 369).

2. Marriage. When and who a person will marry.

These two provisions of fate are firmly believed in. If someone is killed by robbers on a journey (AU, p. 103), or drowns in a river, or dies suddenly, people immediately will say: "This was written on his forehead." When a young woman is displeased with her parents' choice of a husband for her, she sings:

"What can I say to my father and mother?
This was written on my forehead."

Some tales describe the inevitable failure which results when a person who learns about the will of fate tries to change it.

Fate (Baxt)

[The concept of] Fate, the starry sky which revolves and on which everything depends, [55] was transferred almost without change to the Christian god and the Christian conception of time. He is a white-haired old man with a white beard seated on a golden chair in the east or on a lofty mountain, sometimes with a youth who is Grogh ("Scribe/Writer"). Fate commands or brings forth his provisions and Grogh writes them down in his book. Additionally, everyone has an individual spirit *Baxt* sent from God or from destiny which is principally associated with a person's joy or sorrow. Fate, destiny, or God—the Fate which determines death and marriage—corresponds to the entire starry sky while the individual spirits of fate correspond to a particular star.

This individual *Baxt* appears in various guises, such as a youth or an old man (AH, I, 364). Whomever *Baxt* lives with is happy and successful in everything and gets steadily richer. Whomever *Baxt* abandons, becomes impoverished, and for this reason folk endeavor not to offend him. Every family or generation has its *Baxt*. "If you do not guard and see to the house, if you scold or disobey an elder, or if lights are not lit and incense is not burned in a strict and timely fashion, luck will leave the house" (HP', p 66). This shows the similarity between the spirits of good fortune and the spirits of the ancestors. The latter, like the *Baxts* roam around at night and will enter those houses where candles are burning. According to one legend (TT'. p. 372), for three nights no lights were found burning except in one house which had been luckless. "An old man enters this house at midnight...and sat on the couch. The young wife of one of the sons of the house goes to him, greets him and asks: 'Where were you that you did not come to us? You have forgotten us.' Then she washes [the guest's] feet, bringing him dinner, makes the bed, asks him to go to bed. The next morning the young wife sees that no one was in that bed."

The *Baxt* remained in this house as long as the young woman in the house [56] continued to invite it with the lit candle. However, when the bride left that house, the *Baxt* accompanied her.

Baxt often appears visibly in the house; he is seen wearing white garments in the stable (HP', 66), or tending livestock in the fields (AH, I, 364). Sometimes he knocks on the door and enters, etc. If the residents of the house offend or hurt him he will depart for the house of a related family, to the mountains, or the fields and remain there. In some stories folk often go to the mountains searching for *Baxt* and to invite him [to their homes]. Sometimes people picture all the individual spirits of happiness gathered together near destiny (*chakatagir*).

There are a variety of methods employed to invite *Baxt*. In some places it is at the end or the beginning of the year, in other places it is in springtime or in the middle of Lent. During this period special pastries are baked having the shapes of people and animals. People try in different ways to learn about the fortunes and misfortunes of the coming year (HP'. p 70). At the end of the year already girls sit for the *akish*, then run about here and there saying: "*Baxt*, come to me, whether you are on the mountain or in the valley." The following day at dawn the grandmothers and the wives of their sons perform a special ritual. They leave the house, beating the ground with sticks. They turn to the east and say: "Fate, if you are in the mountains or in the valleys, come home!" Then they return home, again beating the ground (AH, I, 366; II, 248).

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V. Worship of Water and Plants

Among the Indo-Germans, the worship of waters and plants is usually connected. For example, among the ancient Iranians, the Amesha Spentas Haurvatat and Ameretat are always recalled together. Haurvatat, "wholeness, health" is a spirit or genius of the water which bestows health on people and protects them against diseases. The Amesha Spenta Ameretat ("immortality") is a plant spirit which protects edible plants and bestows a long life on people, grants immortality, and protects against death (56). Among Armenians, too, water and plants, especially trees, are worshipped together.

Worship of Springs

Almost nothing is known about the worship of water among ancient Armenians. However, one fountain is called the brother of fire (which is worshipped) (AHH, p. 45), and from this we may conclude that the fountain had also become an object of veneration. In today's modern folk beliefs, running waters are sacred. One may not behave badly to them, insult, or spit in them, etc. Almost everywhere in Armenia one may find survivals of an ancient worship of springs and fountains. Some water sources are revered to the same extent as Christian holy places. In front of them on Sundays and Fridays, candles and incense are burned, roosters are sacrificed, and prayers are offered. A new bride, coming to such a blessed fountain for the first time after her wedding, will offer wheat to it. Other magical ceremonies are also performed. For example, when passing by the spring [58] or drinking its water, people will throw a stone or even take a stone, believing that if they do not do so, some relative will die (AH, II, p. 196).

Among the Armenians, worship of water sources is connected with the belief that they

bestow health. A few revered fountains are considered healers of all ailments; others, only of certain illnesses: fever especially, and certain skin diseases. The ailing person first, in customary fashion, offers his worship to the fountain, then leaves in the stream as a gift two eggs and two nails probably as a prophylactic measure. Finally he bathes in the water. If sick people are unable to go to the water, people bring water from the stream to them after tendering the appropriate worship to the stream. However, the person bringing the water must not look back or put the vessel containing the water on the ground.

A large number of streams which are worshipped are mineral water or bear the name of some saint. The origins of many fountains are attributed to saints. There are also some water sources which lack any Christian association but are worshipped, such as milk fountains (*kat'naghbyur*) or light fountains (*lusaghbyur*). Additionally, people believe that light from heaven descends on a few such sources (SHH, p. 11; AH, II, 196 ff.).

Worship of Trees

Many old and large trees in densely forested parts of Armenia are considered holy and are worshipped the same way as water sources. Before them candles are lit, incense is burned, roosters and sheep are slaughtered as sacrifices, the trees are kissed, people squeeze through their split portions or a slender child is sent through their holes to remove any influence of evil spirits. People believe (57) that [59] upon such holy trees light descends from heaven, or that saints dwell on them.

Trees also bestow health. Some cure all ailments, others, only particular ones, especially fever. To receive healing from a tree, one must cut a piece from one's clothing and wrap it around the tree or fasten it with a nail. Folk believe that in this way the disease is transferred to the tree. This is usually done at the same time they are going to bathe in the holy waters. However, when there are no trees around the holy waters, then people cut a piece of their clothes, wrap it around a stone, and leave it by the water. Often when passing by a sacred tree, people leave their walking sticks there to free them from their ailments (AH, II, 200). Sap taken from these trees is smeared on diseased skin. Such trees continue to be worshipped after they dry up, while the rotted wood is used as medicine.

Trees and fountains also cure animals. The sick animal is made to walk around the sacred tree three times and then a stick is cut and left near the tree (AH, II, 198 ff.).

Fountains and flowers may even bestow immortality, but not knowingly on humans. It is believed that snakes will live forever, if they are not killed. There are "fountains of immortality" whose waters are surrounded by various flowers and plants. Old, sick, and

wounded snakes recognize such fountains and plants. They come to such springs and change their skins by eating the petals of a particular flower. Then they immediately slither close to the water source, bathe in it, and drink three gulps of water. After this the snakes crawl out healed and young again. If a person recognizes the fountain and the flower, drinks three handfulls of the water and eats the flower, then he too will become immortal (SGB, pp. 37, 86).

In *Azgagrakan handes* II, pp. 198 ff. some [60] 37 different types or species of trees are mentioned which are considered holy in the district of Varanda. Mentioned with the majority of these trees are also *xach'k'ars* [carved crosses] which have such names as "apple cross," "golden cross," "green cross," etc.

Although these names do not have any particular significance, since the word *xatch'* [cross] designates a holy site, they are nonetheless considered Christian. There are beyond these some eleven other sites which are regarded as having a pagan origin. Such a large number in one district clearly shows how strongly the pagan worship of trees survived among the Armenians.

It is considered a sin to cut down a sacred tree or to cut its branches. It is believed that the trees themselves have the power of punishing the malefactor with disease. Sometimes the punishment is extended to include the malefactor's entire family.

A universal human idea, that plants are sentient, naturally is found among the Armenians. People often behave as though those trees are alive, treat them as people, and talk to them. For example on the feast of Palm Sunday, *Tsaghkazard* [Adorned with Flowers], which the people call *Tsar'zardar* [Decorated with Trees], peasants will take an axe and tap on a tree which does not give fruit, saying: "If you don't yield fruit, I will cut you down."

Bryonia Alba, [Armenian] *loshtak* is considered king of the plants (AHH, p. 73). It is not merely an animate being but one with a human-like form. The fruit and roots of this plant are regarded as a magic wand which can give wisdom and strength to humans and animals. They also cure numerous diseases and ward off evil spirits. As a result, everywhere people try to possess any part of this plant. *Loshtak* is gathered only in the month of May. When harvesting it, certain prayers are recited, and when the root is removed, [61] with the aim of assuaging the plant's anger a goat kid or chicken is tied to the plant—probably originally as a sacrifice. There are also some plants which, though they lack souls and are not worshipped, are nonetheless powerful defenses against evil spirits. Examples are the wild rose and plants with thorns. As among other peoples, thorns are affixed to the door of a house to stay free of evil influences. An especially efficacious defense against the evil eye is provided by the European Nettle tree, *Celtis*

austrailis which people plant in their yards, gardens, and elsewhere, and also by the bush *Viburnum Opulus*. Along with other prophylactic devices, pieces of these plants are kept by people and are also tied to the necks of animals.

Festival of Trees and Flowers, a Folk Romance

The day of Christ's Ascension is the festival of water and flowers. Customarily on that day prophecies are also made. It is believed that during the course of the night for one moment the waters stand still and are silent. On the other hand, heaven and earth, the mountains, rocks, trees, and flowers move, in order to greet one another. First the heavens greet and kiss the earth, then one star another, one tree another, one flower another, etc. All plants and inanimate objects begin to speak with one another and to reveal their secrets. Should anyone conceal himself among the rocks on a mountain and listen carefully, he will hear and understand what the flowers are saying to other flowers and what the rocks are saying. That night, it is believed, they reveal what diseases they cure and which fountains provide cures. Many folk strive to attain to that moment, but only few succeed.

In the middle of that night waters have the most powerful curative properties, and for that reason people jump into rivers and bathe. Since little children cannot be deprived of sleep, the next morning people will warm water, put greens into it, and then wash the children in it (HP', 71).

[62] At that magic moment the door of Mher's cave opens. It is possible to enter, to see Mher and his stallion, the wheel of the starry sky, the wheel of fate, and to obtain every kind of happiness, gold, and wealth. The flowing waters also can bestow wealth since when they stop flowing for one moment they turn to gold, and if someone leaves any object in the water and at the same time wishes that it turn to gold, it will turn to gold (58). Boys and girls go to the river to fetch water at that moment. Divination is also performed. One participant takes along tongs (*akish*), another a spit (*shamp'ur*), etc. Protection by such metal weapons is required since, after taking the water, [spirits] call after the one taking it. Those who look back fall under the influence of evil spirits. The most senior person in the house takes a gourd filled with wheat or barley. Around midnight that person throws the wheat or barley into the river and says: "I give you wheat and barley. You give me good things." Right after this the gourd is filled with water and the wisher hurries home to see if it has turned to gold (cf. AH, II, 247).

Young women and girls engage in fortune-telling or casting lots (*vichak*). Girls begin their preparations the previous day. The day is called the feast of the Mother of Flowers (*Tsaghkamor ton*). On that day, girls gather from the mountains different types of

flowers among which in certain places must be the flowers called *ho'rot-hawrot* and *mo'rot-mawrot*. The names of these flowers may be compared with the names of the Amesha Spentas Haurvatat and Ameretat to whom flowers are also dedicated. In addition, Ameretat is the god [63] of health, abundance, and wealth (59). Probably originally the Armenian *ho'rot-hawrot* and *mo'rot-mawrot* were spirits of waters and plants who today have been transformed into flowers. This hypothesis is based on the fact that it is precisely from the waters and plants of this festival that long life, wealth, etc. are sought.

While a few girls gather flowers, others go to "steal" water from seven fountains, rivers, or wells. This must be done secretly. The "thief girls" must not see each other and no one must know what they are up to. The "thief girls" without speaking fill their pans with water, throw a stone in, and immediately return. While returning they must not speak, put the pan on the ground, or look around them. It seems to them that the mountains, valleys, trees, meadows, etc. are shouting after them. If they look and hear those noises, they will immediately turn into stone (H. Kostanyan, *Shiraki legendanerits' ev zhoghovrdakan kyank'its'* [From the Legends and Folk Life of Shirak], p. 73). The sense of this activity, which is also seen when fetching the "waters of immortality" is best understood in myths and tales. There, the hero goes to fetch the "water of immortality" from a fountain which is guarded by dragons, snakes, and scorpions. The hero secretly slithers toward the water so that the snakes and others do not notice him. He fills his pan with water and immediately hurries to distance himself, since the mountains, flowers and others cry out to inform the keepers of the water. The latter awaken and pursue the hero.

In the evening, the girls who were "water thieves" and "flower gatherers" assemble in a garden. They pour into one vessel—called *havgir* in some places—the water from the seven sources, and then put into it seven stones, and the petals of the flowers gathered. Whoever wants her fortune told will put something belonging to her into the vessel as identification. [64] Those who are not present send their identifying objects so that others will toss them into the *havgir*. After this the girls decorate the vessel with flowers and prepare the lot (*vichak*), that is, two pieces of wood tied together into a cross-shape which is dressed up as the "bride." This doll is then decorated with various pearls, gold, and so forth. This doll then becomes the *vichak* which is mounted over the *havgir* vessel (SHV, p. 86). Then they place the *havgir* with the *vichak* under the stars for the night so that the stars, as the actual fates, act upon the *vichak*. A few girls watch over the *vichak* the entire night to protect it from boys who try to steal it.

The entire ceremony is done accompanied by song. In my own village of Astapat, the ritual begins with this song:

Go and fetch a great expert

Let him perform the wedding of my beloved rock.
Let the sun be the material,
Let the moon be the food,
Let the clouds surround it.
Gather silken threads from the sea,
Arrange the stars as buttons,
And sew what love there is inside it.

(See the variant SHH, p. 295)

For each line, two lines are repeated which are not fully understood. Nonetheless, it appears that the first is a call directed at the stars, while the other is directed at the boys. The following day, or in different places 7 or 14 days later, the girls and young women gather early in the morning in a garden, near a fountain, or if there is no garden or fountain in the village's vicinity, near a brook. They cover the fountain or brook with flowers, green branches, and leaves and then place the *vichak* in it. When everything is ready and they have eaten and drunk, the eldest of them lifts the *vichak* out, kisses it, and passes it to the others [65] who each kiss it in turn (SV, p. 87). Finally they give it to a 7 year old girl who sits in their midst and keeps the *havgir* with the *vichak* in front of her. The girl is called the "bride" and is a substitute for the *vichak*. They cover the girl and the *vichak* with a red veil and sing "*vichak* songs." At the end of each verse, the "bride" removes an object from the *havgir* vessel. The verse that was just sung then relates to the fate of the girl who owns that object (60).

Most of the "*vichak* songs" belong to the genre of folk poetry sung in quatrains, quite widespread among Armenians and other peoples. In form and content the Armenian quatrains resemble German quatrains known as *Schnaderhüpfel*. However, the contents of the "*vichak* songs" deal with two aspects of fate: marriage and happiness. Below we provide several such songs. After each first and third line they add: "Rose, my love (*jan*)" while after every second and third line they add: "*Jan*, flower my love."

O blessed was the day when you were born.
In joy Heaven touched the Earth.
The stars applauded.
What good fruit was born with you!

Here is a pillow
Please come and sit on it (61).
Twelve stars rise
All of them for your fate.

[66] A finger ring fell from the sky.
It came and put itself on my finger.
I knew that the stone was fake,
But my fate turned it into a jewel.

The keys of Heaven
Opened the gates of Heaven.
Golden apples (62) will appear on your table
And your yard will fill with the sun's rays.

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VI. Worship of Fire

Ordinary Fire

Survivals of the ancient worship of fire have been retained in popular beliefs to the present. People swear by the fire. In some places it is considered a sin to say "may the fire be extinguished," and in its place they say "may the fire bless" (AH, II, 194).

Whenever they are forced to extinguish fire or light they pray or mention the name of Jesus Christ. Moreover, fire may be put out only by covering it with ashes, while putting it out with water is regarded as a crime, as is the case among many other peoples (63). Nor may one spit into the fire or pollute it in any other way including scattering it or walking over it.

To the present, fire is considered a potent means of protection. It drives away all evil spirits and protects humankind. Fire plays a special role at night when evil *devs* are present everywhere except in the fire. [67] At night water is the favored dwelling place for evil spirits such that, if people want to wash, first they throw fire into the water (AH, II, 194) to drive out the evil spirits.

It is believed that fire can talk (64). While the fire is crackling, it is alluding to malicious gossip. People will provide names during the crackling and regard as the guilty party that person at whose name the crackling ceases.

Fire and Water as Sister and Brother

Although among other Asian peoples such as the Iranians and Indians fire is regarded as

a masculine deity, among the Armenians fire is considered female. Her brother is water. The following tradition is told about this sister-brother pair (AH, II, p. 195). Once fire and water argued with each other about who was the mightier. They decided to test their strength. The sister (fire) began to burn all the dry vegetation on the mountains, but the brother (water) came and extinguished the fire. From that day the sister and brother were each other's enemies. Ancient Armenians, like modern Armenians, also regarded fire as the sister and some water source as the brother (AHH, p. 44).

Hearth Fire and Worship of the Hearth

The sacred place in a house is the oven (*t'onir*, Eastern oven). It is considered equal to the church, and is sometimes even called that. After a *t'onir* is built, a priest is called in to bless it.

Worship of the hearth is connected with worship of the home fire as well as ancestor worship. Among the Romans, images of the *lares* and *penates* were placed by the side of the hearth. Armenians believe that the ancestors of each family dwell at the edge (*t'onri shrt'an* "lip", *t'onri akum* "eye") of the oven. Since these places are also regarded as the dwelling places of evil spirits (HP', p. 64), we must conclude that under the influence of Christianity [68] ancestors, like all good spirits except for angels, were easily confused with evil spirits. Ancestors sometimes have evil influences and the wicked nature of ghosts. We note that Indians believe that fathers may get angry at, and cause harm to, their descendants (65). As we shall see from survivals of a few ancient customs, Armenians also believe that ancestors who dwell at the edge of the hearth/oven can inspire dread, despite the fact that they are the ancestors of that particular family.

The Iranian custom of saying a prayer after certain happenings such as sneezing, cutting the hair or nails, etc. (66) is still found among today's Armenians. Furthermore, such unneeded parts of the body as nail clippings, hair, teeth which have fallen out, and so forth, are not thrown aside (AU, pp. 102, 103); rather, after performing certain rituals and prayers (AH, I, p. 362), they are concealed in places which are regarded as holy, for example in cracks in the church wall, a home's column, or a hollow tree. This is done because people believe that at the time of resurrection, all these parts of the body must be revealed and if they are not hidden, then in the future they must be searched for. If it is not possible to bury nail clippings, then they must be thrown back over the shoulders while the person repeats three times: "Wherever I go, follow me." After this they believe that the clippings follow the body. However, usually teeth and nail clippings are buried by the edge of the oven or hearth, while praying to the spirits dwelling there, calling them to witness the ceremonies being performed.

When burying teeth, they pray:

Grandfather, take the tooth of a dog
And give me a gold tooth instead.

When burying nail clippings, they say:

[69] Nail, nails, as you stay in this place
May Adam be a witness.

(compare AH, I, p. 362, TT', p. 16)

Here Patriarch Adam, of course, appears in the role of the grandfather.

Ancestral spirits participate in the happiness of their descendants. During family events such as births, weddings, and on other occasions, the spirits return to be near their descendants and graciously or ungraciously interfere. Thus for this reason they merit special reverence during wedding celebrations (67). Without a doubt, the ancient Armenians had similar conceptions of the ancestors. For example, in present-day wedding ceremonies which appear to be quite ancient, we find traces of ancestor worship and the offering of sacrifices to the ancestors which we have already mentioned. For example, a mother, at the wedding of her son, before the couple arrive, will take a board and lay on it 2 or 4 loaves of bread, and a pan with fire in it, into which she puts incense. This she carries first near the oven (hearth) and then takes to the four corners of the home, where the spirits live. Then she comes out of the house and circulates around the wedding couple in the yard. Next, the couple are brought into the house and the bride walks around the oven three times. After this the couple kneel and both of them kiss the "lips of the stove." The bride throws incense on the fire which she has brought from her own father's home, as a kind of offering to the hearth. Then both of them kiss the hand of the eldest relative, who blesses them (cf. AH, II, 140; HP', 62).

Many hearths are sacred for the entire village or district. Thus the hearth of the village's founder, initially its ancestor, is sacred to the inhabitants of that village just as the hearth of the country's ruler is sacred to the land's inhabitants. The wedding couple regards it as a duty, right after the church ceremony, [70] to go and pay respects to such a hearth. Incense is burned, candles are lit, and the blessings of the most senior member of the house are received. Sometimes, as with the Romans and Indians, the marriage ceremony is performed in front of the hearth or oven, especially in those villages where there is no church. They put lit candles close to the hearth or oven, then the bride and groom stand before the hearth facing East. Then they kneel and kiss the hearth. After completing the ceremony they leave the house walking backward so that the hearth does not see their backs, something which is considered a sin (AH, II, 115). Sometimes the baptism of

children is held on the *t'onir*, the traditional family hearth.

Sacred hearths are revered also on other occasions, such as on Sundays and feast days, just like other Christian holy places such as churches and monasteries (AH, II, pp. 137, 139 ff., 195). There are also some hearths which are sacred to all the inhabitants of the country, Armenians as well as Turks, Tatars, and Kurds.

For all families, the hearth is sacred. Before visiting the patrimonial hearth, a new bride will kiss the hearth, and will repeat this kiss after returning. The hearth is the symbol of the family. "Son of a great hearth" is an expression used to designate someone from a "renowned, wealthy family." The hearth fire symbolizes a family's longevity. "May God keep the fire in your hearth ever burning" this expression means "may your line last forever." During prenuptial conversations, the bride's father says: "We have come to kiss the ashes of your hearth and to take some and mix them with our own hearth's ashes." When a new family divides from the old the first fire in the new home is made from kindling taken from the hearth of the old family. Worship of the hearth [71] is associated with ancestor worship not only because ancestors dwell near the hearth but because the sacred hearth itself often seems connected with the grave. Armenians generally believe that every holy place is associated with the grave of a saint or with some incident in the life of a saint. Near Manazkert in a Kurdish village they show a huge tombstone which the Armenians call *aznavuri gerezman* (tomb of a giant/hero). In other places in Armenia also there are "giants' graves" as such ancient gravestones or rocks are called. They take the word *aznavur* to mean Armenia's first inhabitants (68). A few of these gigantic tombs are revered like hearths, in the same way that the Kurds consider some gravestones to be the tombs of ancestral *sheikhs* (SGB, p. 63).

Contamination of fire; Bonfires

Fire is contaminated by everyday use and by nearness to things regarded as unclean such as, among the Iranians, to corpses (69). We also find survivals of this belief among Armenian folk beliefs. For example, in a room where the deceased is placed, a fire is not burned. In some places the water used to wash the corpse is heated under the open sky. In lighting that particular fire, embers from the hearth are not used to prevent the hearth from getting contaminated. Rather an entirely new fire is lit using flint and tinder. That fire is regarded as unclean and harmful after it is heated for this use. Half-burned fragments of the logs are not allowed to remain in the yard; they are thrown into the street still burning. This is the same as among the Indians where "the fire used to immolate the deceased, as a result of the death is considered a source capable of bringing death" (70). [72] All passersby avoid such fires in the street as dangerous. They even believe that if they step on it, a member of their family will die (AU, p. 37).

If a fire is contaminated through everyday useage, it must be renewed from the community's sacred fire. This viewpoint and the practise of renewing the fire is widespread among many peoples and has been examined numerous times. Another survival of it may be seen among Armenians in a ritual. The rite is called *ternadaz, dr'dor'inj*, which is a corruption of *tear'ne"ndar'aj* because it is performed the day prior to the festival of *Tear'ne"ndar'aj* [Candlemas]. This fire festival has even found its way into the Church. It is only in recent years that the church calendar of Ejmiatsin has written about that day "it is reprehensible to jump over the fire." However, the rite continues to be performed.

On February 13 in the afternoon, people bring kindling to the church yard and make a large pyre. Particular sorts of kindling are not predetermined, but usually they burn cane, reeds, and thorns—in some places only these three. We believe that this too is an old custom since among the ancient Greeks as well, thorn is used to light the sacred fire; and similarly, among the Germans, bramblewood, buckthorn, or wolfberry wood are used for fires on Easter (Osterfeuer) and for the prophylactic fire called Notfeuer (71). Thorn is a means of protection and, as we have seen, in ancient Armenian prayer spells, it was ranked as equal to fire and was used for protection. The entire community gathers at night in the church and everyone buys a candle. [73] Following the evening vespers, everyone stands around the pyre but in the first ranks are those couples which were married during that year. The candles are lit from the church lamp, and after the priest has blessed it, everyone lights the pyre from all sides. When the burning of the pyre is ending, but while some embers are still glowing, the people stick their candles into the blessed ashes and carry them home. Then they make a pyre on their roofs and set it afire using that same candle. While the bonfire is burning, young men jump over the flames. Girls and women circle the bonfire, saying: "May I not itch, may I not get leprosy (*och' k'orotim, och' borotim*)" (AH, II, 263). They sing the hems of their clothes. The half-burning fragments of wood as well as the ashes are kept and are scattered at the four corners of the roof, or the stable, garden, and pasture, since the flame of the fire and the ashes protect humans and livestock from disease and protect fruit-bearing trees from caterpillars and worms. In the homes of newlyweds this festival is marked with solemnity, with singing and dancing. The young couple dance at the edge of the flame (SM, p. 108). In some places, special foods are prepared for this festival.

Diverse predictions are made while the bonfire is burning. For example, if the flame and smoke point toward the East, it means that there will be a good harvest that year; if they point toward the West, it will be a poor harvest. Such divinations lead one to believe that this fire festival is simultaneously the festival of the Solstice fire which probably originally was celebrated according to the old calendar, at the end of the old year or at the beginning of spring (AHH, p. 139). Subsequently this festival in Christian times was transformed into the festival of *Tear'ne"ndar'aj*, just as all the great old pagan festivals

became Christian festivals. It is also noteworthy that in the ancient Armenian calendar, the month of February follows the month of Areg (Sun). [74] This fire festival is usually associated with the god Mithra (Mher) since the month of February when the fire festival is performed corresponds to the month of Mehekan according to the old Armenian calendar. This latter name is a borrowing from the Iranians (72). They call their Mithra festival Mihragan=Mehekan which they celebrate as a great festival on the seventh month of the calendar (73).

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VII. Worship of Snakes

Among ancient Armenians we find evidence of snake worship (AHH, p. 150), traces of which are still preserved in modern Armenian folk beliefs. Only harmless house snakes—*lortuk*, *lok* (green-snake, adder)—enjoy a certain reverence. People believe that they protect Armenians from harmful snakes, especially poisonous ones, and can even chase them away. For this reason, Armenians regard them as untouchable and, since they are protectors of the house, they are left in peace to make their nests in the home.

It is believed that every home has its own invisible snake, which pursues evil spirits. This snake is the luck of the home and occasionally manifests itself. Milk is placed before such snakes so that they will drink it and later leave gold in the vessel (74). One folk tale describes how such a luck-bringing snake was mistreated [75] and left the house, taking along with it all the joy and happiness it previously contained (AH, II, 212, ff.). Like houses, localities also have their snakes as protective spirits. Eznik writes (p. 106):

... and also, regarding that [being] called *shahapet*, it does not appear sometimes as a man, sometimes as a serpent, by means of it [satan] introduced serpent-worship into the world.

The Roman *Genius Loci* also appeared in the form of a snake at times. There are also some snakes which are protective spirits for an entire district or region (AM, p. 45). However, the adder (*lortuk*) snakes, they say (AH, II, 212) are "Armenians" and for that reason are well disposed toward the Armenians. Could it be that a dim survival of totemism is hidden in this tradition about snakes? The belief that a soul separated from its body may exist in the form of a snake (75) may also have been held by the Armenians. Labelling a non-poisonous snake "Armenian," belief in a being which can appear

sometimes as a snake and sometimes as a human, the presence of protective spirits of the ancestors for a district and all its Armenians, derives naturally from the fact that in antiquity snakes were accepted as ancestors. The *vishapazunk'*, the descendants of the Median king Azhdahak which are prominent in ancient Armenian folk epics, were originally the snake of the clouds, the storm snake.

The ancient Armenians sacrificed innocent boys and girls to snakes which lived in caves (AHH, p. 150). In some places of Armenia those terrible beings are still worshipped. However, only roosters are sacrificed to them and incense and lit candles are tendered in front of trees snakes inhabit. People seek from them protection from other snakes. It is said that during the time of sacrifices and prayers, large snakes emerge [76] from their nests and slither about among the praying folk without harming them (AH, II, 212). Generally the skins of snakes and particularly the skins of snakes which are worshipped, are regarded as a means of protection against harmful snakes and headaches, and therefore such skins are placed on hats or in the bosom (SGB, 92; AH, I, 369).

There are numerous legends which speak of snakes, and which also relate to the storm snake. Each district has its own snakes which dwell in caves. They also have their palaces there which are mentioned in this passage from Eznik (p. 104): "[dragons] do not have palaces as residences the way people do." The medieval author Vahram Vardapet writes: "Some claim that they have seen the palaces and residences of the *k'ajk'* (supernatural braves) and dragons on the tall mountains" (AHH, 194).

Mountain snakes have their king and queen. The snake king, like all dragons generally, has on his head like a crown a precious sunlike gem or golden horns which gleam like light. These can bestow wisdom and the power of sorcery on those who obtain them (76). The snake queen has flaming hair. The kings have their armies and military commanders and come forth in war against each other with great strength (SGB, 44). Thus, for example, it is believed that the snakes of Mount Ararat, that is the storm snakes, once every two years wage war against the snakes of Mount Aragats. In many stories, snakes appear as the main actors. Often they remove their skins, become handsome young men, and marry maidens.

[77]

VIII. Stories about Thunderstorms

There are two beings made of clouds which appear in the most different forms and battle one another with lightning during thunderstorms. One is a good, humane god which defeats the other, a *dev*, and sends down rain and sunlight, which the *dev* was withholding

from people. Such is the content of most storm tales, both among other peoples and among the Armenians. The field of battle is not the "upper heavens" which is a well-fortified building, but rather the expanse between heaven and earth, the watery visible sky which as Eznik writes is popularly called the Apostles' Sea or Abraham's Sea, the blood red or purple sea. Its first layer is composed of clouds (AH, I, 348), while on top of the clouds is the watery sea whose beginning and end rests on the ocean.

The storm beings are first pictured as two mountain-like monsters or two wild animals who fight butting each other with their heads or antlers. Lightening and thunder are the result of the clashes of their horns or swords (AH, II, 220). Subsequently they are more definitely perceived as a cow and a ram (goat). Thus a riddle speaks of clouds and thunder:

I have a cow, here and there
Its horns stretch far and wide
It drinks water from a milk fountain (*kat'naghbyur*)
And makes noise from the blood sea (77).

In a published variant of this (SM, p. 314) in place of the [78] cow is a mine (*hank'*), a mountain made of brass. Thus the cloud-being which is thunder is regarded as a cow or a mountain-like creature with great horns. In another riddle which speaks of a lightning-producing cloud, we learn that "It is a buck (or she-goat) with sparks on the back." But thunder is also perceived as being produced by the wind, since folk believe that thunder occurs when a wave-inducing wind blows over the heavenly sea (AH, II, p. 220).

The Storm Dragon

Storm snakes play a large role in Armenian folk beliefs. They are called *vishaps* ("dragons"), an old and frequently used word. It is a Persian loanword (78) which is popularly pronounced as *ushap*. Sometimes actual snakes if they are very large, are also called dragons. This, however, is merely a transferral from the storm snake to the real one. Many legends concern themselves with the battles waged by mountain snakes against each other which have led to traditions of snakes in the air fighting over their king's crown thereby causing a change in the weather.

In all stories told about the *vishap* it appears as the personification of a storm, whirlwind, or storm cloud. Its physical nature is quite clear, even if it is somewhat obscured in certain folk tales. From ancient times to the present the dragon represents a whirlwind or storm cloud. [79] Anania Shiraket'si wrote about the meaning of *vishap hanel* ("to remove/pull out a dragon"):

"The whirlwind is a wind that goes upward. Wherever there are abysses or crevasses in the earth, the wind has entered the veins of the earth and then having found an opening, rushes up together in a condensed cloud with a great tumult, uprooting the pine trees, snatching away rocks and lifting them up noisily to drop them down again. This is what they call pulling up the dragon" (79).

Vanakan Vardapet wrote:

"They assert that the *vishap* is being pulled up. The winds blow from different directions and meet each other. This is a whirlwind (*p'ot'orik*). If they do not overcome each other, they whirl round each other and go upward. The fools who see this, imagine it to be the dragon or something else."

Just as the Greek mythological figure Typhoeus represents a whirlwind, water spout, or generally a storm and is also a dragon-like being whose fiery breath and thick clouds fill the sky (80), so too the Armenian *vishap* is a monstrous mythological being which is simultaneously a whirlwind or storm. As a storm figure, it ascends or is drawn up to the sky and dwells in the lofty mountains where whirlwinds intersect, just as among other peoples the storm dragon is associated with chasms and caves. As a being of storms or a being made of clouds, the dragon also frequently changes its form. For example, according to Eznik it appears sometimes as a snake, sometimes as a man, sometimes as a mule or camel (p. 106), or as a hunter pursuing game on a swift steed (p. 107).

Grain which has been harvested may also be stolen from barns by the *vishap*, [80] and then carried off on pack animals (Eznik, pp. 103, 106). The same story about removing a *vishap* is told by many other peoples about a storm cloud (81) or a troll which personifies a whirlwind (82). In the Middle Ages it was said about the *vishaps* that they sucked the milk from cows. The same was said about the Russian Ljeshi, who were both forest trolls, fiery dragons and other beings as well as personifications of a whirlwind (83). Among the Armenians as other folk (84), a damaging breath is attributed to the storm dragon. Thus in a murky passage in Eznik (p. 107) we read:

"Moreover, if the *vishap* should be raised up, it is not by those called oxen, but rather by some hidden power, at God's command, so that its breath not harm men or animals."

The Storm Battle

In all stories about dragons we read that they are pulled from the earth to the sky. As

Vahram Vardapet (13th century) put it: "Many folk have seen how the *vishap* is drawn from the earth into the sky" (AHH, p. 172).

The Greek Typhoeus, similarly, was earth-born. "Just as all storm beings, giants, and all dragons' brood who arise against Heaven are born on earth and rise above the horizon—we say 'a storm is rising'—it is also apparent that they descend again to the earth in the form of lightning" (85). Among Germans, the Donners (thunder) pursue and chase the personifications of the storm, such as trolls and others (86). [81] As Mannhardt writes: "Zeus' battle with Typhoeus corresponds with the battles in German folklore of Thor against the trolls, the Donners against the Waldweibers [forest women], giants, and others" (87). On the other hand, folk believe that during a storm, the dragon attacks the Sun Maiden, though she is ultimately freed by the storm hero (88).

We have already seen how the "great dragon" chases the sun. Folk believe that during the storm it rises to the heavens together with other evil spirits in order to swallow the sun. They are opposed to the sun, and cover it so that people may no longer see its "sunny face." However, the angel Gabriel along with other angels battle against the dragon and Satan, strike them with their flaming swords, and pull the sun back out from behind the dark clouds. "The sounds of this fight are the thunder heard during a storm, the flashes of light are from Gabriel's sword, the lightning is his fiery arrow, the rainbow, his bow" (SGB, p. 109; AH, II, p. 220). In another contemporary tale, as in the ancient ones, the dragon is drawn upward during a storm. As already noted, people believe that the flying and fiery dragons, just as all snakes and dragons, are immortal unless slain. They grow continually, and when the dragon reaches the age of one thousand it presents particular danger, since it is able to swallow the world. When it resides in water, for example in Lake Van or other lakes, it is capable of drinking all the water contained there. But just at that moment the angels descend from heaven, bind the dragon, and, during the storm, drag it upward. The flying flaming dragon during this encounter battles the angels, twists about, breathes fire, and often spews water on the earth. The angels continue to draw it upward until, [82] near the scorching sun, it is turned to ashes which fall back to earth. Sometimes the dragon's wildly spinning tail gets loose and falls to the ground, or the angels let the dragon go and it falls from the heights of heaven onto a mountain where it breaks into many tiny pieces. People say that during a storm they often see how an old dragon is pulled up to heaven from mountains or lakes, while dragons which live in the sky descend, or how a dragon which is chained to the sky shows its frightful head and extends its tale down to a lake or river. A meteorological phenomenon often seen in Armenia during storms, illuminated layers of clouds, is regarded as the fiery body of the dragon. Lightning, they say, is the staff or wand of the angel Gabriel or the other angels, with which they beat the dragon. Thunder is the bellowing of the dragon being beaten. Finally, the dragon is broken into small pieces which fall to earth like snakes, that is to say, the torrents of rain are viewed as snakes (cf. SGB, p. 92; AH, I, 351). Here we have

the ancient story of the battle between Indra and Vrtra. Kuhn writes (89) : "People say that Vrtra, whose name literally means 'enveloping' as well as 'cloud' cuts off the light from reaching the earth. Then Indra, with a band of Maruts or winds, arises against it, lightning bolt in hand. As soon as Vrtra is struck and killed, waters flow down from the mountains, or, as is also told, the entity called Ahis (which means snake) which until then had sought refuge in the mountains, rolls down, and the sun again appears in the firmament."

In the Christian era, the angel Gabriel with a band of angels has taken over the role of the ancient storm god and his retinue. [83] Among the Armenians and others in the Christian era, Elijah often is substituted for the storm god. He also brings rain. According to one tale, when he forcefully and swiftly drives his four-horse chariot, to catch a debtor fleeing from him to retrieve the money that was loaned, the rattle of the chariot is thunder (*Handes grak. ev patmakan*, 1888, p. 371), and the flashes of lightning are caused either by the chariot's wheels or by the whip used to goad the horses (AH, I, 349). The debtor and the money, of course, in modern times takes the place of the storm dragon and the clouds of rain that he has stolen (90).

In another variant of this tale, a cloud-monster has become Elijah's adversary. Folk claim that "Lightning is caused by the fiery wand of Enoch-Elijah, and thunder is caused when Enoch-Elijah mounts the cloud and runs about there. He strikes it with his wand and it roars" (NH, VII, p. 33). Since thunder is perceived as the roar of the cloud-monster, it is customarily called the "cloud's bellowing." There is a saying: "There will be no rain until the cloud roars." But since the roaring only happens when Elijah strikes the monster with his lightning, there is another saying: "There will be no rain unless Elijah strikes."

Tsovinar

The meteorological phenomenon of phosphorescence during a storm which the Germans call "flying goat" (91) or flying or beaten ram (92) is called "fiery eyes" (*hrach'k'*) by the Armenians (K'amalyants', S., *Tsovinar* Tiflis, 1888, p. 26). However, this meteorological phenomenon is not personified as an animal spirit but as a human-like storm spirit with blazing eyes. [84] Sometimes it appears with its fiery eyes, meaning lightning, burns everything it touches, and then disappears. The word *hrach'k'* is also applied to a virgin named Tsovyar or Tsovinar who dwells in the upper atmosphere (Balasyants, *R'ostom ev Salman*, Tiflis, 1896). She rides or, as they say, plays, dancing among the clouds, riding on a fiery horse. Fire shoots out of her horse's eyes and even more so from her own eyes. No one can look at her radiant, luminous face, since she always covers it with a veil. She also appears in the form of a smiling man. On dark, stormy nights she suddenly sticks her head out from the clouds and looks downward. This causes lightning or, as

they say, Tsovyan is playing (TT', p. 275). In one tale (NH, V, p. 40) we read: "Hill and valley have grown dark, and when I speak of darkness, you must think about the darkness of the night... The wind howled and tore at the trees, clouds and fog covered the earth. Tsovinar (lightning) danced as if she wanted to burn up the whole world."

In folk beliefs prayers are addressed to this dancing Tsovinar. She is a wrathful, punishing being of lightning who sends hail to punish humankind, but she also is responsible for the rainstorms which bring fertility. "It is a black, stormy night", says a popular description of the storm (K'amaleants', *Tsovinar*, p. 31 ff.), "there are no stars and no moon. Wherever you look, you see nothing: the soil is black, the sky is black... and scattered clouds there beat one another over the head and their screams are thunder." At such times, people are afraid that the sky will collapse. On the approach of such storms the frightened peasants see to their preparations quaking with fear at the howling and thundering of the clouds. One woman will throw an iron tripod or trivet out of the house in the belief that God will thereby divert the lightning. Another will place a needle between the spaces in her teeth [85], while another will place a stone on her head and fearfully repeat: "Stone on the head, iron teeth." And then Tsovinar will appear in the sky crackling in the light and fire. Immediately thereafter she releases moisture from her bosom which falls and brings fertility to mountain and valley. Then all rejoice and exclaim:

"Dear strong Tsovinar
Turn your gentle face toward us
We offer lambs and cattle as a sacrifice to you
Remove the pain we suffer."

Tsovinar has her own set of tales which in many respects comport with the myths of storm gods and heroes. Four variants of the most widespread version of one such tale already have been published. In this story, Tsovinar appears in the role of a thunder goddess. Such a conception corresponds with the widely held belief that thunder is produced by the trampling sound of the hooves of a horse ridden by a woman in the sky, whose whip produces lightning (AH, II, 220). This demonstrates that the Armenians, like the Greeks, had a female divinity of lightning and thunder along with a male god of lightning.

The etymology of the word *tsovyan* can only be explained as consisting of the root *tsov* (sea) with the genitive ending *yan*, indicating origin or derivation. Thus *tsovyan* means "born of the sea," or "child of the sea," "created by the sea." Another word, *tsovinar*, is an adjectival form of the word *tsovyan* with the suffix *ar* which is used similarly in other words. For example, from the word *zard* (ornament) comes the woman's name Zardar; from the root *oski* (gold) comes the man's name Oskyan (also Oskan), and the female

form of it, Oskinar. Tsovinar is also a frequently encountered female name. The form Tsovyar is also encountered as a proper name. Probably Tsovinar and Tsovyar were originally used as epithets for the deity of lightning [86] and only later used as personal names. Such epithets are quite understandable since, during storms, the sky appears to be giving birth. "The pregnant storm cloud [*i.e.*, the storm sea], in the vortex and the shocks of the storm and groans of thunder are perceived as labor pains" (93). Thus it is perfectly natural for a lightning hero or heroine to bear the epithet *Tsovyar* or *Tsovinar* (born of the sea) when we consider that both among Armenians and among other peoples clouds were perceived as part of the heavenly storm sea. According to this perception, the [Indian] lightning god Agni is called *apam napat*—son of the sea. Similarly the storm god Indra, and the god Triton are styled *aptya*—born of water.

The Lightning Hero Sanasar

Although somewhat obscured, in the folk epic [David of Sasun], Sanasar is a storm god and dragon fighter. He and his twin brother were born of the sea and are called *tsovyar* (son of the sea). He also calls himself this to differentiate himself from the earth born. The mother of these twins is inseminated in just the same way as the German mother of twins whom Manhard equates with Indra (94). She had gone to the shore to divert herself when suddenly she hears a sound and the sea opens. A fountain gushes forth. She bends over it and drinks one full cupped handful of water as well as half a cupped handful, and "becomes pregnant from the sea." Later we shall see how seaborne Sanasar descended into the sea and obtained the "fiery" horse. There he too drinks from a milk-fountain (*kat'naghbyur*), from which he becomes "mountain-like" and receives enormous strength to battle his foes with. [87] The gigantic storm gods usually consume huge quantities of food and drink. Similarly in the Armenian tale, thunder, is a mountain-like storm being with horns, that is, a bull, drinks from a *kat'naghbyur* in a blood red sea and then thunders there. Sanasar's weapon is the lightning sword which, together with the fiery horse, he obtains in the sea. The lightning sword is the favorite weapon in Armenian folk tales and legends. People believe that it is forged in heaven "by lightning in the fiery clouds" and then descends to earth. Such a sword can cut through anything such as iron or rock, and at one stroke can kill thousands of men. Whoever owns it can conquer all the *devs* and enslave them. When the sword is struck it lengthens and reaches its target (cf. AH, I, 350). Sanasar goes by horse with other braves to the mythical City of Bronze, which is surrounded by high walls and lacks a gate. His fiery horse flies into the city. The city is dark and black and suffering from a lack of water. The king's attractive daughter, who shines like the sun, sits in her dwelling as though in a prison. Black curtains are hung over the windows. To win her, Sanasar must retrieve from the roof a golden apple which gleams like light. Then he must fight a dragon in the

sea. He does these things: securing the golden apple at night, battling with the dragon in the sea, and snatching the precious gem which it has on its head. During the war with the dragon, water is released and the city gets drenched. "Like rain it poured down and wet the city." "What do we see the following day? The king's daughter has opened the windows of her palace and is shedding her light on the city." In other words, the Sun Maiden has been liberated. In this story the connection between the dragon and the Sun Maiden is not completely clear, and, unfortunately, we lack another published variant. Nonetheless, that this is a storm tale in which [88] the Sun Maiden is persecuted by the dragon is clear from the stormy battle itself.

Among Indo-Europeans, the storm heroes have two types of enemies: giants and dragons. In popular folk beliefs the angel Gabriel fights against a dragon, a *dev* or, generally, against evil spirits. In the folk epic giants and *devs* also appear not only in the cycle about Sanasar, but also in the cycle about his son, David, who (probably like his father) is a lightning hero. He is merely a double for his father, a phenomenon which often occurs in folk tales. Forty thieves, giants, and *devs* steal David's cattle and take them to their cave. David pursues and kills them with his club. In their cave he finds a mass of gold, silver, a fiery horse and a lightning sword.

Manuk Abeghyan

Armenian Folk Beliefs

Lightning and its symbols

Elijah or Gabriel and all angels generally slay evil spirits with lightning wands (AH, I, 349). With the angels pursuing them, evil spirits flee during a storm, taking shelter in a rock or a tree. But lightning hits the rock or tree and chases them off. However, more often such evil spirits prefer to hide behind people since the lightning angel or Elijah is benevolently disposed toward humans and often does not want to strike them along with the evil spirits. During a storm, because of the evil spirits one needs to constantly make the sign of the cross and call on the name of Jesus Christ, to avoid being hit by lightning. When people are so protected, the evil ones are scared off and folk are safe from being struck by lightning. But this is just a Christian means of protection. The pagan and most powerful protections are the very symbols of lightning themselves, flint and steel.

Originally lightning was perceived merely as a stone or stone weapon. Even today people curse, saying: "May God strike your head with a stone," and understand "flint" by "stone." But more often [89] they give to lightning the name "sparks and fire" (*kayts u krak*) and "God's fire." The word *kaytsak* (lightning) consists of *kayts* (fire) and *akn* (stone, precious stone). Thus in Armenian *kaytsak* means flint or a fiery stone. And this is one of its most ancient understandings. Indra hurls flaming stones, Thor's hammer originally was made of stone and called *Mjólnir*— since *an.myln* (fire), in Old Church Slavonic *mlunija*)—means spark/lightning (95).

Lightning is also regarded as an iron weapon heated to red hot, which angels hurl at evil beings. It falls to the ground lit up and hot. If a man finds and uses it as a sword in battle, it will have all the qualities associated with a lightning sword. It can even heal people who are at death's door (AH, I, 350). In accord with this perception there is another word, *shant'* which also has the meaning of red hot iron. *Shant'* designates not merely lightning

but also fire and iron falling from the sky—red hot iron—as well as a tripod. A lightning sword is also called a *ketsel* (*kaytseal*) sword. Still another word, *p'aylak* [lightning/flash of lightning] is composed of the word *p'ayl* and *akn*, and thus originally meant a radiant or shining stone. This term stresses the flashing quality of lightning.

Thus the weapons of the storm god are rocks, fiery glowing rocks, iron, and red hot flaming iron. Associated with them are the lightning sword, club, fiery arrows, etc.

The lightning god (or the angel Gabriel) chases and slays evil beings by means of such weapons. However, these weapons appear in human hands [90] as means of salvation and protection (96). Flint and *hraham* ("that which brings out the fire") have special effects, most potently when they are used to generate fire. Folk even believe that sparks from lightning enter into flintstone and remain concealed there until they are removed from the stone when fire is produced (AH, II, p. 195).

Corresponding with this is what is called *hraham*. Sometimes people believe that lightning in the sky is produced in this same fashion (AH, II, 220). Thus in modern Armenian when there is lightning, people will say "*kaytsakin tal* ("to give sparks/lightning") which signifies to strike the flintstone.

One story (NH, VII, 33) begins:

"Once Poghos Mat'ikents' had ground some corn. At night he arose to return home. As he passed the cemetery at the foot of the mountains, he saw someone who came down from the mountain and blocked his way. This evil spirit wanted to deceive him, to take him and put him in danger. But Poghos did not believe him, and said to himself, 'this evil spirit wants to trick me.' He uttered 'Jesus Christ' to defeat the evil spirit, but the evil spirit was not defeated by that nor when Poghos made the sign of the cross. Poghos was terrified. Then he remembered that he had flint and some steel in his pocket. He quietly removed them from his pocket. When he struck a spark all of a sudden the man disappeared."

Consequently, this spark had more of an effect than the name of Jesus Christ or making the sign of the cross.

Among Armenians belief is still strong in the saving quality of flintstone and iron, all iron tools and weapons, and a few types of stones. This plays a big role in daily life especially at birth, marriage, illness and on other important occasions. Here we will highlight only a few details relating to these events. [91] To protect against being struck by lightning during a storm, one arms oneself with symbols of lightning. People use one hand to hold a stone on the head, and the other to hold a needle in the space between teeth and they

repeat: "*k'araglux, erkat'aer'ik'* (stone on the head, iron on the teeth)", cf. p. 71. These precautions chase away evil spirits which could be hiding near the speaker. The same thing is done as soon as thunder is heard (AH, II, 220) to prevent hail from falling and, generally, when hail *does* fall, since hail is also regarded as a weapon of the god who uses it to attack evil beings. When people happen to be in a field when hail falls, and neither stone nor iron are available, they pick up the hailstones and hurl them back over their heads to chase the evil ones from them. During hail and storms, all iron implements are placed under the rain and hail to make them stop.

Iron and steel are also considered a perpetual protection against the influence of *devs*. People don iron bracelets and rings, and keep flintstone close by especially when they are obliged to be alone in some uninhabited place, since evil spirits may manifest themselves to people during daytime, if they are alone. A similar protective effect is worked against evil spirits by sewing a blue glass bead (*kapoyt ulnike*) onto a garment and wearing it. In the case of certain skin diseases, sparks are poured on the sick persons to heal them. Particularly subject to the effects of evil are newlyweds both during and after the wedding, and so they wear on their persons a closed lock, or a folded knife. During the wedding, the best man who does not separate from the couple, carries a sword to protect them. When the couple pass through a door, the best man makes the sign of the cross on the door's threshold since such thresholds are regarded as dwelling places for spirits.

Lightning symbols, particularly iron, are considered more efficacious if they are deployed or prepared on Fridays, especially on Good Fridays (NH, VII, 31). [92] Bracelets and rings are purchased which were made from steel which a blacksmith had struck a few times with his hammer on Good Friday. Such protective devices, which are called *arurk'*, are made by blacksmiths only on Fridays (*urbat'*), from which they are also usually called *urbat'arurk'*. The blacksmith must rise very early on that day and begin and end work without talking (97).

Thus Friday is considered the day of magical influence. Perhaps we may propose that this day was dedicated to the storm god. This suggests itself from the fact that the *urbat'arurk'* are considered more efficacious on Fridays, just as among Germans lightning symbols are more effective on Wednesdays and on feast days dedicated to Donner (98).

Drought and Customs Associated with It

When there is drought, people believe that witches, who serve the *devs* and are ranked as their equals, bind the sky or the clouds (SM, 116). They try to release these bound clouds using various methods. The first method involves a great procession which visits

four sites or mountains located on four sides of a city or village. The participants during the procession are barefoot and hatless, often taking along some saint's relics which they have had brought from a holy place. They also make sacrificial offerings. The sacrifice itself is called *ts'asman hats'* (Bread of Wrath) since they also believe that God himself is angry and prevents the rain from falling. [93] Alongside such customs—which are probably pagan in content, yet are considered Christian—other ceremonies are performed which have not entered the church. Without uttering a word folk will fetch a rock from any holy site and place it in a field to bring rain (A. Araratyan, in his poem *Erasht* [Drought]). The rock, of course, is a symbol of lightning. Other peoples also have similar beliefs that thunder and rain will occur if a person moves certain rocks (99). Another way of bringing rain involves writing some magic words on a rock and throwing the rock into water (SM, 116). Germans prefer to take a skull and throw it into running water, or to sacrifice a sheep and throw its head in. They also pitch a priest's wife into water and pour water over her.

Yet another survival of this cult, which is found among other peoples involves the custom of leading a plough into a river. This ritual is performed by girls and women. The most senior of the group, or a priest's wife (AH, I, 359) puts on the priest's vestments and steers the plough. The others, also dressed in men's clothing, are yoked to the plow and drag it through the water, going against the current. One of the most widespread methods is known as the procession of Nurin which usually is held by children. This is a very familiar custom also known among other peoples such as Greeks and Slavs. In this, a broom or a piece of wood is dressed up to resemble a girl. Then, holding it in their hands, the participants proceed from house to house. In front of each house the children sing a song, a variant of which follows (NH, VI, 107):

Nurin, Nurin has come
Wondergirl has come.
She is wearing a red blouse
And has tied on a red belt.
Bring water to wash her head.
Bring oil so we may groom her hair
[94] By the grace of God, may rain fall
To make your father's field green.
Give our Nurin her share.
We want to eat, drink, and be merry.

Then the children ask: "Do you want it from the window or from the door" (AH, I, 360)? If they want it from the door, then water is poured on Nurin from the window and, conversely, if they want it from the window, then the water is poured by the door. The children are given butter, eggs, rice, and so forth, and then continue on with their

procession. Finally they take Nurin to the river and throw her into the water. Sometimes they put the head of a pig or a ram on Nurin and cover it with branches.

Since the rain producer, thunder, or *Ge''r'ge''r' baba* (100) dwells in high places, his worship is usually connected with mountain tops. Many mountain peaks in Armenia which are sites from which thunder and rain arise, probably also are regarded as sacred places, since rocks and trees which have been hit by lightning are considered holy. Connected with such high places are numerous local customs and tales which, regrettably, have yet to be collected. In the district of Varanda (AH, II, 191) near a sacred place there is a boulder with a hole through it. In times of drought, women light candles on this rock and pour water through the hole so that rain will come. There is another boulder in the same area on which, during drought, water is poured and, as a sacrifice, a milk pudding is prepared. The boulder is considered holy and people are afraid to walk on its summit, since it punishes those who do. There is yet a third boulder that not only can cause rainfall but can stop it if the rain lasts too long. For this, they light a fire at its base.

There is a variant on the sacrifice tendered to the thunder-maker who also happens to drop hail: [95] while the hail is falling, people toss salt into the air, in order to turn the hail into rain (AH, I, 360). Another custom involves the bones of an animal (probably sacrificed the same day to the storm god), which are placed outdoors under the falling hail. With the same intent, the shells of Easter eggs are also put under hail (AH, II, 244).

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Armenian Folk Beliefs

IX. Spirit of the Wind

Nothing is certain about worship of the wind and its deification, whether among ancient or modern Armenians. But we must suppose that the popular Saint Sargis is the personification of the wind and the representative of the ancient wind deity. His essential nature betrays his pagan and physical origin.

In the Armenian Church calendar, there is no feast day bearing Saint Sargis' name. Nonetheless, folk have named after him a five-day fast which usually falls in February, a time of storms and snowstorms on the Armenian Highlands. During other fasts, Armenians may eat only all-vegetable meals, yet during the Saint Sargis fast, young people for five entire days eat nothing at all or, eat only a piece of bread at night. This particular type of fast shows the regard held by Saint Sargis who, as a wind deity, demands self-restraint.

His character as the wind is clearly discernible in several customs and tales. During the fasting, many people pull some hairs from their heads and throw the strands into the wind with a prayer, in the belief that Saint Sargis will carry off their ailments along with the hair (AH, II, 251). [96] Thus Saint Sargis is equated with the wind. He stirs up the wind and snow and, like the Iranian wind gods Vayu and Vata (101) is sometimes bad, sometimes good. He can smother people with his snowstorms but usually this happens not to Armenians, but to Greeks and Georgians who do not recognize him as a saint or did not in the past. In one story we learn that a Greek (or Georgian) unexpectedly encountered a snowstorm on his journey. He appealed to Saint Sargis to save him and promised as thanks to dedicate a pair of candles to him. Saint Sargis caused the raging wind and snowstorm to stop, and the Greek reached home safely on his horse. Leaving

the horse in the yard, he entered the room and proclaimed to his wife: "Woman, I have tricked Saint Sargis. He saved me from the snow, but I will never dedicate the two candles I promised him." When the man came out of the house to lead his horse into the barn, suddenly Saint Sargis caused a snowfall in the yard and buried him alive.

Saint Sargis is especially hostile to the Kurds, although certain Kurdish tribes revere him no less than the Armenians. However, the Kurds revere him not out of love, but from fear. Among such Kurds, all sorts of labor and activity is halted during his holiday. They believe that if they profane his holiday, in that same year they will be buried under the snow and on the day they go from one village to the next, Saint Sargis whom they call Xe"de"r Nabi will send a ferocious snowstorm against them out of a completely clear sky, and that this blizzard could be survived only by a miracle (*Ardzagank'*, 1895, No. 18).

[97] Belief in the appetite of the winds and the need for feeding the winds is widely held among Indo-Germanic peoples. The winds are fed with flour to keep them peaceful (102). During weddings people make sacrifices to the winds and try to arouse their pity so that they stay calm during the time of the wedding. The wind gods themselves come forth as participants in the ceremony (103). Among Iranians, young girls in particular appeal to the wind god Vayu, since he has the ability to bestow marriage and bridegrooms (104). In German mythology, the wind god himself circulates around with a woman, the "bride of the wind" or "the wind's lover" as, for example, a wild hunter with his woman such as Wotan with Hulda (105).

When we examine Saint Sargis we see that he displays all these characteristics. First he, if not his bride, is portrayed as a voracious eater. For the most part, snowstorms and blizzards are caused by the latter when folk do not endeavor to satiate her. The feeding of Saint Sargis, which is somewhat vague, appears in two variants. Young, unmarried people, especially girls, must not be big eaters. They must not eat with a full spoon, nor must they eat up everything on their plate. Ordinarily they must leave a little something on their plate so that Saint Sargis does not raise a snowstorm on their wedding. A snowstorm or blizzard during a wedding is a sign of Saint Sargis' dissatisfaction and of the couple's voracious eating habits. That is considered disgraceful for the couple. Conversely, they are regarded as fortunate [98] if Saint Sargis shows a clear sky at their wedding feast. Now if the wedding is held in summer or spring, Saint Sargis can generate a ferocious wind and rain if he is displeased. Generally, he is associated with storms and hail, just as the storm gods are. To stop the hail, an old man or woman must strew in all directions flour made from wheat that has been roasted and ground during the time of the fast of Saint Sargis (AH, II, 243).

Saint Sargis is particularly fed during his festival. Everywhere in Armenia on the last day

of the festival they grind roasted wheat. This flour, which is called *p'oxind* is mixed with grape juice, made into a paste, and eaten. The *p'oxind* flour or dough is placed on a board which is put behind a door or on the roof and offered to Saint Sargis. It is the grandmother who usually does this. She prays while offering it, saying: "I would die for you, Saint Sargis, and for the horse you are riding. You always appear at the right time. May your horse make his hoofprint in this flour (HP', 67).

They believe that on that particular night Saint Sargis will come riding on his white horse having just abducted his bride a Rum (Byzantine/Greek) girl who sits behind him on the saddle. In one hand he holds a lance adorned with tassels. With a cloak over his shoulders, he travels all over Armenia. "From the snorting of his horse, clouds and fog form which become snowflakes. From the clattering of his horse's hooves the earth shakes. From the play of his lance a whirling snowstorm arises" (AH, I, 251).

With his bride, Saint Sargis visits the homes of all Armenians to inspect the *p'oxind* flour. Seeing it, the pair are delighted and Saint Sargis orders his horse to leave a hoofprint in it. Before going to bed that night, young people, especially girls, will eat a salty wafer so that they may [99] see water in their dreams. Saint Sargis has arranged things such that people who are predestined to be friends will give the thirsty dreamers water (106) or that he himself will reveal their future mates, the good and bad things that will befall them, etc. On that holiday, the young try to learn about their futures in other ways. For example, they place a pastry on the roof and wait for a crow to carry it off to another roof. If there is a boy in that house, he will be the bridegroom.

Vayu, the Iranian wind god is noteworthy for his speed and power. "For this reason soldiers, particularly, apply to him in times of difficulty and when troops are attacking each other. However, he also assists those in chains and captives." He has an attractive human form, a spear, golden helmet, golden weapons, a luminous carriage and shining horses (107). The Armenian Saint Sargis has all these attributes except for the chariot, since given the country's mountainous terrain, chariots or carts would have little speed. In the mind's eye, he quickly appears to those in difficulties who call upon him, riding on his radiant horse.

In one tale (TT', p. 334) we learn about a poor minstrel who loved the daughter of a wealthy man. The girl also loves him, but her father would not consent to their marriage and planned to give her to someone else. The young minstrel, as he is taking leave of her to go to a foreign country to make his fortune, says: "If I have not returned after seven years, you are free and may marry another." After seven years he is returning, but on the final day he is late and still a few days away from home. In desperation he calls on Saint Sargis. The latter appears instantly, [100] puts him on his horse and says: "Close your eyes." The young man closes his eyes. Then, at amazing speed, they fly through the air

over mountains and valleys. Then Saint Sargis says to the minstrel: "Open your eyes." The minstrel opens his eyes and finds himself in his native city where he then marries his beloved sweetheart.

As a wind spirit, Saint Sargis also is regarded as a ruler of wolves, who are seen as the animal form of mist demons. In one story (AH, II, 252) wolves surround a man who is travelling and he calls on Saint Sargis. Since the man had always observed his fasts, Saint Sargis comes to his aid and chases off the wolves with his spear. In anti-wolf spells, he also appears as the ruler of wolves.

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Armenian Folk Beliefs

X. Water, Forest, and Mountain Spirits

Just as there is a close connection between the worship of water and plants, so too the spirits of water and forest are often intertwined. The latter are also associated with mountain spirits. However, since belief in such spirits has begun to disappear from Armenian folk beliefs, the distinction between the latter two types of spirits is also being lost. Frequently the different types of spirits and *devs* appear under the general rubrics of "satan" and "evil spirits" which are also seen as having human shapes. Such blurring of distinctions, evidently, has to do with the influence of the Christian religion.

Popular imagination animates the floors of lakes, rivers, and other water sources with the same scenery as appears on the surface of the earth. The only difference is that under water, everything is either gigantic [101] or stunningly beautiful. Enormous, glowing palaces built of precious gems, pearls, and coral rise up there. Nor are gardens lacking, with their flowers and fruits. Their lords are mermen and fiery maidens.

Fiery Horses

Eznik writes (p. 98): "Like the *tsovats'ul* ["sea bull"] which, they say, came from the cow...nor did the *tsovats'ul* which dwells in lakes arise from any cow." Subsequently he writes: "In our village [people say there] was a *tsovats'ul* produced by a cow." To the present, Armenians hold such beliefs. Many water sources, especially rivers and lakes are considered dwelling places for mythical beings of human and animal forms which possess fiery natures and are called *hreghen* ("fiery").

Of the animal-shaped beings we shall discuss here fiery buffaloes and especially fiery horses. They usually reside in lakes and often emerge from the water and interbreed with other animals of a related type. From such unions are born pure white, spotless foals (SHH, 76; SGB, 36).

Fiery steeds are the darling of Armenian folk tales. One such fiery horse is K'urkik Jalali from the well-known folk epic *Braves of Sasun* [*David of Sassoun*] who was obtained from the sea by the hero Sanasar, who is himself seaborne. The horse was passed hereditarily from one generation to the next in that House. It is currently believed that he lives with the immortal hero Mher [Mithra/Mitra] confined in one of the caves around Lake Van. Fiery horses are also found in caves of the *devs*.

In the epic, Sanasar acquires his steed in the following way. As a boy he fled with his brother from the king of Baghdad who wanted to sacrifice both of them to the "great Idol." The lads reach the shore of a lake. The senior brother, Sanasar, says to his brother Baghdasar: "It would be better for us to be buried in the waters than be sacrificed [102] before the idols of that pagan king."

Baghdasar did not dare to do this, but Sanasar threw himself into the water. As he went, the waves pulled back and Sanasar descended into the lake where there was a garden on the bottom. He saw a saddled horse and a lightning sword hanging from it. [Sanasar] marshalled his courage to mount the horse, but just then the horse spoke:

"Earthborn, what are you doing?"

Sanasar replied: "I will mount you."

[The horse said:] "I will ascend into the sky and you will burn up."

Sanasar replied: "I am seaborne and will hide under your stomach."

The horse says that he will fly down to earth and throw [Sanasar] into the abyss and kill him. [Sanasar] replies that he will stay on the horse's back. All these events then are played out, and finally the fiery steed accepts Sanasar as his master, saying: "I am your horse, you are my master."

Hnark's

This word means intriguers, devisers, skilled, clever ones; in Classical Armenian, it also means cheats and deceivers. As the name indicates, these beings are very adept especially at building magnificent bridges. They also manifest themselves as evil and treacherous beings, hiding under bridges and pulling into the water whoever crosses the bridge at night, especially children. It is also believed that at night or twilight the *hnark's* can strike people who are bending over flowing water to get a drink. They can appear on horseback

and strike at swimming children and pull them under. Hence the saying: "The river calls out to God day and night to send it some unwashed person who bathes, to be its prey" (NH, VII, 78).

Because of their evil nature, the *hnark*'s lose their virginal beauty [103] and manifest themselves as hags of the water or creatures resembling evil spirits. They may also take half-animal forms or appear sometimes as humans, sometimes as animals, especially snakes (NH, VIII, 26; AH, I, 340). We find a similar belief in Eznik in connection with a mythological water creature known as the *nhang*: "*Nhangs* are beings which appear in false forms" (p. 102). "For a *nhang*—were there such a thing—might take the shape of a woman, or sometimes as a seal to drag swimmers down by the feet and drown them" (p. 106). However, people believe that the *nhang* is a human of sorts (pp. 102-103), that is, that it has human form and, as other such fabulous creatures, was originally of human form. Usually they kill swimmers but sometimes they pull them under water only to make love to them.

***P'eris* [fairies] and *Haverzhaharses* [nymphs]**

These "fiery maidens" dwell not only in water, but also love to live on dry land, in forests, meadows, by beautiful rocky river banks where they emerge from streams and rivers, sit on boulders and comb their golden hair (AH, I, 338). They are gorgeous, with splendid shapes, blond or red hair which falls to their feet, with their loose curls flowing down their shoulders and wrapping around their naked bodies. Their large blue eyes (they do not have dark eyes) glow like suns and their countenances radiate light. In such manner they often appear to young shepherds who, ensnared by desire, run after them hoping to catch them. But this is a vain hope, because the *p'eris* with their small feet run so lightly that they barely touch the ground. As one tale has it, "Grass continues to grow under their step" (SM, 88). They also promote the growth of meadows. When they see the Morning Star or the rays of moonlight, [104] they leave their watery abodes and like beautiful brides, they go everywhere in groups, to the forests, fields, villages, cities, running and scattering dew on the plants. Amidst the green vegetation their faces shine like the spring moon and when they breathe through their small rosebud-like mouths, their breath passes through the greenery like a sweet fresh morning breeze. *P'eris* very happily establish close relations with humans. People firmly believe in their reality and tell many tales in which *p'eris* pull men under water and marry them. The well-known tale of the mermaid marrying a man is also present among Armenians. A *p'eri* cohabits with a man on the condition that he tell no one about it. They live together for a long while, but then the man breaks his word and the *p'eri* departs. Only on his deathbed does the man again see her with their three children (AH, I, 340).

In fairy tales and other wonder tales, the *p'eris* also appear with wings, like doves or partridges. They remove their wings, turn into beautiful maidens, and bathe in lakes.

K'ajk' [K'ajs]

Usually the virginal creatures, the nymphs (*haverzhaharses*, "perpetual brides") are inseparable from their bridegrooms. But just as nymphs appear under different names, so too do kindred male spirits. They are often called *k'ajs* ("braves"). In some places (AH, I, 340) as husbands of *p'eris*, they too are styled *p'eris*, although that name properly and originally applied only to females. However, in other places where the word *k'aj* is frequently used, both man and woman beings of this type are called *k'ajs*.

K'ajs and nymphs have human origins as is described in this passage preserved by Bishop Ar'ak'el. [105] "Some say that [the nymphs] are actually *k'ajs*. For they relate that after the flood, Noah had a son, Maniton, and a daughter named Astghik. When God asked Noah: 'Have you other sons or daughters,' Noah was embarrassed and replied: 'No, I have not.' At that point the two children turned into *k'ajs* and vanished. For this reason, they are said to be mortal, they are born and they die. Whenever they are seen, there is the ambiance of a wedding, perpetual music and dancing" (AHH, p. 208).

To the present, the same tale is told about the origin of *p'eris* and evil spirits (AH, I, 338). For example, one such tale states: "God had commanded Noah and his sons in the ark to remain chaste. But Ham disobeyed and a son and daughter were born to him in the ark. When the flood waters receded, God opened the door of the ark and everyone came forth one by one, except for these two children who were left inside, in shame. God, standing near the door, asked: "Is anyone else left inside?" "No one," they replied. Then God said: "If they are there, let them vanish." The brother and sister disappeared on the spot. The *p'eri* maidens and their husbands descend from them. And they are like humans only they can appear and disappear at will.

Although they have a human origin and although they are under God's curse, they are nonetheless regarded as standing higher than humans. They are often called "our betters" or "our superiors." If they are ranked equal to evil spirits and called evil spirits, they get angry and seek revenge.

K'ajs and *p'eris* usually appear together, but their physical nature is different. [106] Only seldom do the *k'ajs* live in the water. They usually only live on high mountains, boulders or stones where they have their palaces, or in mountain caves and crevices, called *k'ajatun* ("house of a *k'aj*") or *k'ajak'ar* ("*k'aj* rock"). Deep valleys covered with densely foliated trees are their favorite residences, and these are often called *k'ajadzor* ("*k'aj*

valleys"). In such places, and especially on the slopes of deep canyons, they are the lords. During the daytime folk are afraid of going places where *k'ajs* dwell. The echoes heard in such mountains, caves, and forests are their mocking repeats and are therefore called *k'ajadzayn* ("k'aj noise"). They also seem to reveal their presence in the air, since a small, variable whirlwind is called *k'aj k'ami* ("k'aj wind"). The blowing of the wind is considered their breath, and should someone get a chill and become sick from such drafts, it means that he has been struck by the *k'ajs* (NH, VII, 26). They also like to remain on trees, especially walnut trees, or under them, and hurt those who sleep there. But they may be found everywhere—in the vicinity of apartment buildings or in them, in stables, graineries, and especially under the thresholds of houses. *K'ajs* and *p'eris* love to socialize and appear at night in groups. They are usually seen in wedding processions, singing, playing, and dancing. They go around with the bride and groom in the vicinity of caves and on roads and streets until dawn when the bell of "thieves' hour" is run, or the cock crows. They are entirely naked. However, the *p'eri* women love to adorn themselves with clothes when dancing. For this reason they may steal the best clothes of young women, though locked in closets. They wear them, dance, disport themselves (soiling the clothes), and return them at dawn. To prevent them from stealing clothes, village women place sewing needles in their dresses.

[107] They greatly love charming and capturing men and women and forcing them to be their dance partners. However, this is considered a dangerous practise, since they usually play some malicious trick on them. In order to deceive people, they assume the form of friends and lead them into their fold, but sometimes they take them to deserted places where people are subject to danger. These include falling from high rocks into chasms, freezing to death, falling into a well, etc. Such a story told by Movses Xorenats'i and others is well known and concerns Artavazd. The *k'aj* seized King Artavazd while he was out hunting, took him to a dark ravine and chained him there.

Although regarded as rational beings, *k'ajs* and *haverzhaharses* have no skill in using their hands. The aforementioned author Bishop Ar'ak'el writes: "*Haverzhaharses*, as irrational animals, have a knowledge of their own nature. They are unable to forget anything or to learn anything new." Elsewhere he writes: "*Haverzhaharses* lack ingenuity since they have no breath (souls) which would make them capable of knowledge. Whatever they know they cannot forget, but they are unable to learn anything new" (AHH, p. 209).

For this reason they cannot build homes, sew clothing, or prepare tools. But they love art. Not only do they steal clothes, but they love to live in uninhabited houses, deserted mills, and in the ruins of old fortresses and churches. Since they cannot play music, they invite to their weddings human musicians and other humans to exploit their skills. An example would be a barber, invited to shave the groom. Sometimes they reward such

folk. In one widespread tale (108) [108] they call on a midwife during the night to help a woman *k'aj* who is in painful labor, and as payment they give her onion and garlic skins which turn to gold. However, if their gifts are rejected they do not transform them into gold.

The physical nature of the *k'aj*'s birth is still preserved in the belief that the *k'ajs*, like the south-Slavic *Vilens* (109), are born when rain falls though the sun is shining. When such a sunshower occurs, people say: "The *k'ajs* are bringing a boy." In some places they also say: "The wolf is eating."

The *k'ajs* often steal people's babies and subsequently use them as shepherds to tend their flocks. These flocks of theirs are game. Such stolen children are given as gifts the ability to shape-shift and to disappear. The *k'aj* will steal healthy, beautiful babies from the cradle if they are not somehow protected, and substitute for them their own sickly, ugly babies which usually do not survive. Stories about such magical changelings are widespread and diverse (110).

In the Middle Ages folk believed (AHH, p. 194) that the *k'ajs* caused fights, stole game, stole grain from the threshing-floors, and siphoned wine from the wine stores. Such traits are also attributed to dragons. Today people believe that above all else they love to eat pastry types of foods: puddings, halvah, and bread rolls (*gat'as*) (cf. AH, I, 325).

Wherever such dishes are cooked or baked, the *k'ajs* stand ready to steal the choicest morsels. Cooks, when such pastries are unsuccessful always assign blame to the *k'ajs*. [109] With the aim of distancing them, the cook will tell children a story [meaning it to be overheard by the *k'aj*], for example: "They are taking him to the executioner to be skinned." The *k'aj* hears this, believes it, and, interested in seeing the spectacle, quickly departs leaving the pastries and food alone. They love to eat what people have prepared, but they themselves cook pudding. They put a cauldron on the fire, and circle around it, saying these words: "It lacks butter and flour." And butter and flour, drawn from human kitchens, fill the cauldron, from the kitchens of people who, despite their prosperity, are too stingy to give a portion to the poor. For their weddings, they slaughter a cow, skin it, roast it (NH, VII, 29) and eat it. Come dawn, they reunite the animal's skin and bones and return it, alive and well. Usually only a single foot may be lame. This is because some musician or barber invited to make merry with them at the wedding feast has stolen a bone to verify the animal's identity. This is one of the oldest and most widespread of tales, told about German elves and Indian *rbhus* (111).

The *k'ajs* often torment horses in the stable, mounting and riding them around so long that in the morning the horses are found drenched with sweat and exhausted. If some tar is smeared on a horse's body, *k'ajs* will stick to it and get caught. It is also possible to capture a *k'aj* by sticking a needle into their clothes, since that prevents them from

vanishing. Let me cite one tale about this:

"Once, early in the morning, before the bell had sounded, Velum went into the stable to feed the livestock. What does he see? He sees a wicked *k'aj* girl wearing his bride's wedding dress, a *k'aj* girl mounted on his black horse, having driven it [110] about so much that it is sweating and on the verge of dying.

This girl was one of the *kajs* which haunt the stables. She was a beautiful girl with red hair which looked like it had been dyed with henna, and which fell loosely on her shoulders. She sat on the horse and braided its mane. Velum approached quietly from behind and thrust a needle into the girl's back, saying: "Jesus Christ." The girl was unable to disappear because of this. She begs and pleads with Velum for him to remove the needle. He ignores this, takes her hand, and leads her home. The church bells ring, but the girl is unable to vanish. Velum brings forth a bracelet made of steel and puts it on her arm, and a steel ring for her fingers, or a steel necklace. Henceforth the girl must serve as his maid. Now they say that their feet are reversed, with the heel in front and the toes behind. If you send her somewhere, saying: "Go and return soon," she will go off and you will wait in vain for her. But if you say: "Go and come back later," she will go and return quickly. Seeing this, you learn to tell her the opposite of what you really want. Now it happened one day that the *k'aj* woman was home alone with a small girl. She said to the girl: "Oh, this hurts. There is a needle in my back. Please pull it out." The girl did so, not knowing [about the spell]. Then she has the girl remove the necklace, ring, and bracelet. Free at last, the woman strikes the girl, making her a demoniac. Then she herself vanishes (NH, VII, p. 31).

Devs

Armenian folk belief knows little about dwarves or legends associated with them. All it does know is this: that dwarves are called *achuch-pachuch* or *ajoj-majoj*—who are the Gog-Magog of the Alexander legend, known in the Quran as *vajuj-majuj*. The *ajoj-majoj* are a human tribe that dwells [111] at the end of the Earth. They have the height of a fig. But it is also said that people will become smaller over time, until finally they get so tiny that when they are about to pass through the eye of a needle, they exclaim: "Glory be to God, what an enormous door this is!" That must be the final race of the *ajoj-majoj*. After that no human will live, and the end of the world will take place (SHH, p. 352). This is the extent of Armenian folk knowledge of dwarves.

Giants play an incomparably greater role in popular folk beliefs. They are called *devs*. This is a loanword from Iranian (112) and an old word in Armenian, and one that is used

frequently. It signifies also an evil spirit, demon, and is occasionally used in the sense of Satan or a *k'aj*. Giant-*devs* for the most part appear in fairy tales and legends and have no significant impact on people's lives, since they dwell far from humans in their Devastan, or on the mountains and behave merely as robbers. They are closely connected with *vishaps* and in many tales one substitutes for the other.

Below we will examine some characteristics of *devs* from the national epic [*David of Sassoun*], though the same features may also be found in folk and fairy tales. Armenian *devs* share many characteristics with German giants and Yoden (113).

Devs as mountain spirits are immense, humanlike, rough and raw beings, "as big as Pogh hill." Just as mountains often have many peaks, so too the *devs* often have two, three, or seven heads. Their dwellings are located on mountains or in mountain caves, as well as in waterless deserts and dark canyons. They may occur singly or in groups, each with three, seven, or forty brothers. They hunt, chop wood in the forest, [112] and do everything that men do except in a gigantic and gross manner. They are also very strong and usually use as weapons boulders, millstones, or "rocks the size of mountains" which they hurl at any hero they are hostile to. However, they fear the mythical heroes David and Mher who are themselves mountainlike giants. If the giants do not kill them, then the *devs* will befriend the heroes, help them, and respect them. In caves and inside mountains the giants possess vast treasures, gold, silver, precious stones, valuable goods, as well as fiery horses. They keep this wealth and do not even use the horses. They happily steal cattle and take them to their caves. But they also steal beautiful girls, and the daughters of kings. These are well cared for and the giants provide them with whatever they desire, especially "golden wonders" as, for example, a golden cat and gold mice on a board, a gold rabbit chased by a gold hunter, etc. The giants do these things to entertain and engage the girls, hoping to win their love. But this never works, since the girls deceive them for such a long time with ever new requests until the hero—usually a lightning or storm hero—enters the cave, kills the *devs*, and frees the girls.

Female *devs* which usually appear as the mothers of *devs* are also mountainlike and have enormous breasts. Like the modern Greek Lamis, the Neraiden (114) they throw them over their shoulders. For the most part they stay indoors in caves where they cook, knead dough, and bake bread, while their sons are out hunting. These giant mothers are more favorably inclined towards the heroes than are their sons. They conceal these humans. At night, when the *devs* return from hunting, they shout from afar: "There is a smell of human flesh about." They want to eat the men, but subsequently they end up fraternizing with the heroes. There also exist terrifying female beings [113] which eat not only humans, but even *devs*. In the epic [*David of Sassoun*], the queen of Aleppo is such a being whom Mher kills.

The *devs* are always beings with simple minds like children, or, they are great fools. Though they boast of their strength, they nonetheless admit to the superiority of human intellects.

Folk believe that a few Armenian monasteries possess their own *devs*, which serve that particular monastery. One such renowned *dev* is the Lame *Dev* of Saint Karapet's monastery, which transports the monastery's ashes underground and dumps them at a spot near the village of P'rebat'man, two days' journey from the monastery. A large mound is located there, formed from this ash. One song has it that:

Saint Karapet defeated the *devs*
and put them in jail.
But the Lame *Dev* came and said:
'Don't put me in prison.
Spare me, and I will haul off
the ashes from Saint Karapet.
I will take the ashes and
dump them at P'rebat'man
until the coming of Christ."

(SGB, 105; Sedrakyan, *K'nar Mshets'vots' ev Vanets'vots'*, p. 7)

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XI. Spells and Evil Spirits

Spells, called "prayers" are still widespread among Armenians. They are either written or oral. The former are written down by sorcerers on long strips of paper which are folded, sewn into garments, and worn. The verbal spells are kept alive by the people orally and recited as needed. [114] Christian prayers are also written down like the spells, although the actual incantations have the same content as the oral folk spells. The main difference is that most of the written spells are in prose whereas the oral spells were composed in rhymed verse, and bear the stamp of great antiquity. Most of them take the form of a dialogue or start with some epic-like verses. The content itself is often distorted to the point of incomprehensibility.

These spells are directed against evil spirits who harm people and cause illnesses. Examples of this are the evil night spirits, those who harm women giving birth (the *als*), *Grogh*, spirits of disease, and the evil eye.

The Wolf and Wolf-binding Spells

In the preceding sections we described evil spirits of the night who appear in human or animal form. Here we want to discuss in more detail the wolf, since the wolf occupies a prominent position in Armenian folklore and, in spells, it figures higher than all the various night evils embodied by snakes, scorpions, frogs, etc. Also the wolf in Armenia is the predator which inflicts the most damage. Consequently, in spells the wolf's name is inseparable with predatory beasts.

The wolf appears as a *dev* and is equated with evil spirits which take human form. One tale says that "The wolf eats evil beings, otherwise those evil ones would destroy the world. But each year every evil spirit devours a wolf and thereby reduces the number of wolves in the world. Otherwise they could not save themselves from all the wolves" (NH, VII, p. 34).

Sometimes the wolf-demon has a bipedal form. Therefore spells against wolves will them to be bound by their two big toes and eight other toes. Resembling humanlike *devs*, the wolf's toes point backwards and its heels are forward. [115] Lightning which can destroy all *devs* also can destroy wolves. Therefore symbols of lightning such as flint and steel, especially when they produce sparks, are a defense against wolves. Flint itself is also called *kaylxaz* (that which tears up or burns a wolf).

Prayer charms against wolves are called wolf-binding (*kaylakap*) prayers. Usually they are repeated three times, and while such prayers are being recited, other magical procedures for binding are performed. For example, a laddle is tied to a column of the house with a black cord, a knife is bent, or seven knots are made in a string which is then put between the teeth of a comb while other objects, such as an axe, are placed on top of it (NH, VII, p. 134).

Folk believe that through the power of such prayers and acts, wolves' tongues and mouths are stuck fast, their teeth fall out, their sharp claws become dulled, their eyes become blinded by sunlight, they lose their way, etc. As long as the binding remains in effect, a beast is unable to harm sheep or other domesticated animals which may be near it. For seven days straight the wolf remains in such a state, then it is freed (AH, II, p. 238). Also spelled along with the wolf are snakes, scorpions, and generally all the evils of night. Mentioned most in such spells are the names of two holy figures, the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Sargis. The following example may be considered representative of this type:

The Mother of God is on the mountains.
The Son of God is in her arms.
A column of light comes from her heart.
In her hand are three nails.
One penetrates the heart of Satan.
One penetrates the mouth of the wolf
Which roams about at night.
The third is for the evil spirits
Which swirl around my head.
I have bound Satan on an immovable rock
And secured the binding with a nail.

(cf. AHH, p. 341; LJ, p. 11)

[116] The incantations differ. One, for example, says:

...with hair from the tail of Saint Sargis' horse
Bind the wolf, bind the wild beast,
Bind the scorpion and those that sting
Bind the snake and all biting things
Bind the night sea.
May their mouths be shut when they enter these boundaries
May their mouths be opened when they depart.

(LJ, p. 10)

A spell in the form of a dialogue, says:

The son of Galust
Was the shepherd of Christ.
He sat down at the intersection of seven roads
Where he wept and wailed.
Christ asked him:
"Why are you crying and lamenting?"
"My Lord, I cry and lament
For I fear the wolf, beasts
And all predators that wander at night."
[Christ told him:] "Go to [the church of] Saint Simeon
Take the iron chain and steel key which are there
And put them before the thief's feet,
And the wolf's mouth
And all predators
That wander in the night."

(NH, VI, 147)

[117]

The Werewolf (*mardagayl*)

There is still belief in werewolves and in some situations it appears very strongly. Real dangers that face small children are associated with werewolves. Since on summer nights people often sleep out under the open sky, children are sometimes exposed to the risk of

being snatched and eaten by predatory beasts. However, people do not believe that this is the work of predators, but rather, of legendary werewolves.

The werewolf is a human, usually a woman, who was transformed into a wolf. Something like hail falls from the sky as nourishment for such wolves. When God wants to punish a woman, He forces her to eat some of this wolves' food. Immediately a wolf's skin falls from the sky onto the woman (AH, II, 226). She is thus transformed into a werewolf resembling a female wolf, with great pendant breasts (NH, VII, 35). At night she dons the wolfskin and wanders about with the wolves, eating corpses, etc., while during the day she is a normal woman, after having removed the wolfskin. She does this for seven years continuously, and during this time, ravishes and eats children. Should she herself have a child, she starts with him or her. She is very clever, doing everything like a human. There is no salvation from her. Closed doors open before her of their own accord, or else she enters through closed doors. She runs like the wind and is able to make a journey of many days in just one hour—such that no one can detect her absence from home. A werewolf cannot be killed by a knife or weapon. The only way to save oneself from her is to take and burn her pelt. However, during the day she hides the skin and it is difficult to find. After seven years, the wolfskin ascends to Heaven on its own accord, and the woman returns to being a normal human being. Sometimes, only one trace remains of her prior condition, usually a tail (cf. NH, VII, 35; AH, I, 370).

In popular speech there are different stories which mention werewolves. We shall cite only one, which describes the origin of the Milky Way. In this story a werewolf creates the Milky Way, in the same way that the [Greek] goddess Hera does. A young newly married woman, the story says, had been transformed into a werewolf. Once when washing a guest's feet, she observed that the feet were very white and tender. She liked this a lot. At night, when everyone was asleep, she put on the wolf's pelt and came to devour the guest. [118] However, the brave guest stabbed her in the breast with his dagger. Milk squirted from her breast into the sky, and traces of this milk are till now visible as the Milky Way.

***Als* and Maidens Giving Birth**

There is a category of evil spirits which are especially hostile to human reproduction. These spirits are called *als* (*alk'*) and appear as bristly and shaggy half-animal half-human figures. In one charm prayer (AHH, p. 223) the *al* is directly called an evil beast. They are usually described as having fiery eyes, bronze claws, iron teeth, and the tusks of a wild boar. They hold an iron axe in their hands. Their habitations are outdoors, on mountains and in sandy places. They like to sit in the road at sandy spots. From there they come and enter homes, staying in stables in dark corners or near the eaves. They are

usually called "men," but both sexes are represented, and they multiply like humans. The mother of the *al* frequently appears in folk tales and spells. They have a king who lives chained and constantly shrieking in the abyss, buried up to the neck in lead.

One legend (AH, I, 344) says that God created the *al* to be a comrade to Adam. However, they did not suit each other since Adam was made of earth while the *al* was made of fire. When God saw that, he create Eve. From that time forth, the *al* has been inimical to Eve and to her sex. It imposes sexual abstinence on young couples, enters the womb, and destroys the fetus. With these methods it increases infertility.

Above all, the *al* is a danger to those giving birth and to the newborn. One spell says:

I make the children of women wither,
I dry up the milk
I darken the eyes
I suck their brains out and make them dumb
And take babies from the womb prematurely.
[119] I eat the flesh of the babies and drink their blood,
And I darken the light of their eyes.

There is another one which says:

I sit down on the childbearing woman
And make her ears burn.
I pull out the liver
And strangle the mother and the child.
Our food is the flesh of the woman giving birth, and the child.
We steal fetuses of seven months from the mother
And take them, deaf and dumb, to our king in the abyss.

It appears that the *als* are also spirits of lust which visit women in their sleep.

Armenian *als* belong to the type of spirits which include the Roman *stryges*, *silvans*, and others (115). For the most part, the means of protecting oneself against them are the same: lightning symbols and other objects which have the power to expel demons, and spells called "birthing prayers." The Mother of God, often appealed to as a "vanquisher of evil" is also appealed to against the evil *als*. Her name, *Mariam*, is used as a spellword and is repeated continuously during labor. In one birthing prayer (LJ, p. 3), Mary's own labor is perceived as follows:

Blessed, blessed Rose Maiden
With a luminous Sword before her face...

The vestments of Christ on the shoulder
She gave birth to the son of God.

Village women perform everything which is described in the charm prayers. This includes placing a sword or dagger under the pillow of a new mother, and all sorts of other iron tools and implements. During labor pains the village women strike the air with their hands, believing that thereby they are hitting the *als*. They also beat the surface of the nearest creek, because it is there that the *als* would wash the stolen liver. They take a priest's cloak and throw it on the woman in labor, and also place [120] iron chains on all sides of her, etc. (HP', 64). Should the woman giving birth happen to faint, those present become seized with fear. At this juncture they place things on the roof—even the child if it has been born—as offerings to the evil spirits, so that they will be content with the baby and spare the mother (AH, II, 146). This is the sole survival of *al* worship. Until baptism, mother and child are regarded as unclean and people avoid touching them to escape evil influences.

Daily bathing in the kettle is considered the best way of keeping the baby clean.

At birth, two birth maidens and their brother also play roles. They seem to be beings associated with fate, beings which Indo-Germans and other peoples also believe in. Among Armenians, such beings' association with gods of fate has been dimmed. The two sisters are called *Ch'orek'mut* (Wednesday eve) and *Urbat'amut* (Friday eve), while their younger brother is called *Kirakmut* (Sunday eve) or *Hishtek* (116). Young women pay homage to these three by engaging in no work or intercourse after vespers on the evenings of Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturday. Women giving birth pray to them, and they will manifest themselves if the woman has always faithfully worshipped them. The brother sits behind the door, shuts the door, and executes his sisters' orders, bringing water, etc. and doing as told. The sisters can speed up a birthing. If the woman is alone, they wash the baby, and do good deeds such as preparing eggs for the woman to eat, etc. [121] They also give the baby a name using word play and recite a spell by which they give the child some grace or benefit. For example, in one tale they name the child as follows (AH, I, 342). The first sister says: "Let his name be Asatur." The second cries out: "Astvatsatur." The third, the brother, adds: "May God grant him whatever he wants." The child grows very quickly. The grandmother, who hates him, tries to kill him, but in vain because the two sisters and their brother protect him. Thus their saying was fulfilled. Tales with similar contents exist among many peoples.

The birth maidens and their brother protect the woman against the evil effects of *devs*. One birth spell says:

There was a rushing sound and a resounding clatter.

Come out and see who's here!
There are people astride three horses,
With marvellous illuminated faces.
The three of them are wearing green robes.
One is Jesus, one is Christ,
One is the Mother of God of the dark forests.
They came by mountain and valley
With good angelic faces.
"Our Lord, where do you go with your retinue?"
"I go to the house of a sick person
Through the skylight, to a woman in labor.
I will put chains on the wall
I will take a hoe [or iron keys] and toss them
On the cushions of the sister.
For a full day this will confound the evil spirits
So that [the woman's] heart does not fail
And her tongue does not turn."

Cf. variant in LJ, p. 3; HP', p. 65.

These three riders are certainly the three birthers under Christian names. But they will appear only to those women who have venerated them.

In one tale (AH, I, p. 345) and in a few written spell prayers, [122] Christ or some other saints are transferred from the delivery room to the mountains, where, while hunting or riding, they seize an *al* up to its evil deeds. They tie it to a rock, but its mother comes and begs the saints to free her son. The saints do this on condition that they must not harm those who invoke the saints.

Spirits of Disease, and the "Evil Eye"

These two types of spirits in charm prayers are recalled and cursed together, since they have practically the same influence. The spirits of disease are called *ts'av*s ("pains") and illnesses also are sometimes called *groghs*, just as the wicked angels of death. They personify diseases such as fever and plague, and are small creatures who wear triangular pointed hats (AH, I, 298). They have their own chief who knows which country and people God no longer wants to protect. [The chief] writes their names in his book or receives a similar book from God in which are already recorded the names of people who are fated to receive a certain disease or death. The chief collects his *groghs* or *ts'av*s and has them punish a country. Each *grogh* has its own district.

Groghs have three types of punishing rod which are colored green, red, and black. With the green rod they strike those who will fall sick for a short time. With the red rod they strike those who will be sick in bed for a long time. With the black rod they strike those who must die. Parts of the body they hit will turn blue. When someone suddenly falls down and/or dies, he has been struck by a *grogh*. Cholera, plague, and all epidemics are their doing. When people are killed in massacres and fields are deserted, the *groghs* have their hands in it (SM, p. 80).

The spirits of diseases, that is, the *groghs* are sometimes classed with sorcerers. They are not [123] mere personifications of disease. We may best understand their physical nature and their connection to the *groghs* through the following story of a sorceress: "That night I had summoned the chief of the *groghs* for advice. He had a fiery green rod in his hand with which he struck the ground. At this, in the twinkling of an eye, thousands upon thousands of *groghs* assembled. Their meeting place resembled the land of Baghdad—a flat plain without beginning or end as far as the eye could see. There were no green plants, birds, or animals there, only black stones and mountains of sand. The heads of the *groghs* are in the clouds, their feet extend down into the abyss below the ground. Their faces are black as pitch. Their lips hang down to their knees. Their mouths are as big as Lake Van, their tongues are like the castle of Van, their noses are like Mt. Sip'an. Their bodies have bristles like a pig, and from each bristle fire and flames shoot out. They have wings like a bird and can walk like people. But if they put one foot down in Baghdad, the other foot is at the Black Sea. If one hand is in China, the other stretches to Frangstan [Europe]. If they choose, they can shrink down to the size of a flea or enlarge to the size of a black cloud that envelops heaven and earth" (SM, p. 79). The cloudlike nature of the *groghs* is evident in this description.

The most dangerous spirit of disease is the "evil eye," which is a personification of "flickering lightning in the clouds." The angry or frightening glance from this entity can harm not only humans and animals, but everything it encounters (117). The eyes of lightning beings called *Hrach'k'* and Tsovinar are fiery, [124] and can burn everything. The *als* too can cause damage with their single fiery eye. But the evil eye itself is merely the personification of destructive lightning. It is lightning itself, seen as a *dev*'s single eye (118). The storm nature of the evil eye among Armenians may be seen at the beginning of this spell: "Then the evil eye came thundering like a cloud and roaring like a lion and wriggling around like a snake" (AHH, p. 385).

In Armenian folk beliefs, the "evil eye" plays an important role. As a being, he is a *dev*, the personification of evil itself, who roams everywhere and has 666 illnesses with which to harm people and spoil all good things. In the spell cited above, Christ (or another holy being) sees the evil eye wandering around and asks: "Where do you go at this hour, you filthy, accursed thing?" The evil eye replies: "I am going to disrupt those at work, to

make the bull collapse under the yoke, to make the cow's udder dry up, to deprive the sheep of milk, to make the good child waste away, to torture the child in the mother's arms." Then Christ binds the evil eye. In a variant of this prayer, the evil eye says:

"I am going into the horns of the red cow,
The big horns of the black buffalo,
The hatchet and its grip
Into [King] Solomon and his throne
Into the child in the cradle,
Into the eye of man, his head, his life
Into the eye of woman, her breast, her hair."

Thus all good things—horses, sheep, millstones, good fields—are damaged, afflicted with disease, or suddenly destroyed by the evil eye.

Such is the evil corrupting influence of Ahriman [125] on Ormazd's good creatures. Ahriman has a physical aspect in the form of a snake, with which he fights against Ormazd with the aim of talking over heaven. Ormazd then says to Zoroaster: "At the moment when the snake Angra Mainyu looked at me, it was death itself and brought forth 9 and 90 diseases and 9,000 and 90,000 diseases" (119). This resistance of Ahriman, for which he creates *devs* and inanimate objects to fight against Ormazd is called *paity-ara*, resistance or opposition (120). In Armenian, the same word appears as *p'at'erak*, *p'ayt'erak*, *p'et'erakel*, *p'at'erak ar'nul*, and also means "to give the evil eye" or to bewitch or be bewitched by the evil eye (cf. Hüschmann, *Armen. Gramm.*, I, p. 254). At the same time, the word *p'et'erak* means "storm" (*p'ot'orik*).

The demon of the evil eye is usually perceived as a blonde man with blue eyes, sometimes as a black man with brown eyes. For example, one incantation says:

I have bound [the evil eye's] arm and elbow
I have bound the blonde and black man.
I have bound them with triple-twisted hemp.
One I bound.
One I hanged.
One I hurled into the bottomless sea.

Another spell says:

The eye of the blue-eyed [demon] burst.
The eye of the dark-eyed [demon] burst.

Ordinarily, a man's very blue or green eyes are considered evil (NH, VII, 28). One

should beware of people possessing them, for when they give someone else the evil eye, nothing that person does will succeed. The witchcraft here resides precisely in the praise and congratulations that such a person offers. [126] If he bids travellers a good journey, then the traveller will invariably encounter a disaster. When he sees and praises a good pair of buffalo, or a good horse, these animals will die immediately. A horse which has been "given the eye," collapses, a tree dries up, a baby will die of sickness, etc. (SM, p. 111). Folk seek to eliminate such evil effects with various charms and spells. When people encounter men with the power of the evil eye, they spit and say: "This is for you, evil satan." They also will spit on a rock and then turn it over, so that the influence of the evil eye transfers to the rock. This belief appears to be quite ancient. [The ancient Armenian historian] Movse's Xorenats'i relates that King Ervand was regarded as possessing the evil eye, and for that reason the court servants would keep granite rocks in front of the king when dawn came, which would explode at his evil glance. People who are bald, pale, one-eyed, cross-eyed, lame, blind, etc. are still considered dangerous, though not to the same extent as those possessing the evil eye. This is because all these physical flaws are seen as the result of evil influence. In one spell the Virgin Mary is weeping *en route* to Paradise or near the shore of the sea in front of Paradise. Christ meets her and asks why she is crying. Mary attributes her tears to the evil eye and 366 (or 666) foul diseases.

"How could I not cry,
How could I not shed tears?
I have killed 40 horses and 40 mules
Because of the evil eye.'

Christ invites her to enter Paradise. Then He takes the knife of the Apostles and excises the evil eye and 666 foul diseases, binds them, and casts them into the bottomless sea. The Mother of God inquired: "What do they eat?" And Christ replied: "They eat rock, vinegar, and the leaves of the plant *Viburnum Opulus*." (LJ, 14-15)

Along with spells, frequently certain ceremonies are performed. [127] For example, round dumplings are prepared, wetted with water and then tossed into a blazing fire. If the dumplings explode in the fire, so too does the evil eye explode. Often, in spells, the evil eye is sent to the fire: "The evil eye to the evil thorn; the evil thorn to the burning fire."

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Abbreviations for Armenian References

AU—Allahverdian, J. *Ulnia kam Zeyt'un* [*Ulnia or Zeyt'un*] (Constantinople, 1884).

AH—*Azgagrakan hande's* [*Ethnographic Review*], E. Lalayan, pub. vol. I (Shushi, 1895); vol. II (Tiflis, 1897).

HP'—Hovsepyan, G., *P'shrank'ner zhoghovrdakan banahyusut'yunits'* [*Fragments of Popular Folklore*] (Tiflis, 1893).

LJ—Lalayan, E., *Javaxk'i burmunk'* [*Fragrance of Javaxk'*] (Tiflis, 1892).

NH—Navasardyan, T., *Hay zhoghovrdakan hek'iat'ner, zruyts'ner, erger, aghot'k'ner, sovorut'yunner ev ayn* [*Armenian folk tales, sayings, songs, prayers, customs, etc.*] Books I-VIII. Books VI and VII also contain some material from my own collection.

ShV—Sherents', *Vana saz* [*The Saz of Van*] (Tiflis, 1885).

SGB—Srvandztyan, G., *Grots' ew Brots'* [*Written and Spoken*] (Constantinople, 1874).

SHH—Srvandztyan, G., *Hamov-hotov* [*Delicious and Fragrant*] (Constantinople, 1884).

SM—Srvandztyan, G., *Manana* [*Manna*] (Constantinople, 1876).

TT'—Ter-Aghek'sandryan, *T'iflisets'ots' mtavor kyank'e"* [*Intellectual Life of the Tiflis Armenians*] (Tiflis, 1885).

AHH—Alishan's *Hin havadk' kam het'anosakan kronk' hayots'* [*The Ancient Faith or Pagan Religion of the Armenians*] (Venice, 1895), served as a source for information about ancient Armenian religious beliefs. This is a detailed exposition of information on our topic culled from ancient and medieval Armenian sources.

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Footnotes

The notes have been renumbered. The figures in parentheses indicate the page and number of the note in the original text.

Page 6

1. H. Hubschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, I, (Leipzig, 1897) p. 155.

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2. (8, 1) Tylor, *Anfänge der Kultur* I. p. 425 ff. Lippert, *der Seelenkultus*, (Berlin, 1881) p. 6 ff.

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3. (9, 1) H. J. Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda* (Berlin, 1894), p. 526.
4. (9, 2) Cf. Tylor, *Anfänge der Kultur*, I. 432; Lippert, *Seelenkultus*, p. 31.
5. (9, 3) Cf. Tylor, *Anfänge der Kultur*, I, 433.

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6. (10, 1) Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda*, p. 563.

Page 11

7. (11, 1) A. Bastian, *Die Verbleibsorte der abgeschiedenen Seele* (Berlin, 1893), p. 8.

8. (11, 2) A. Bastian, *Die Verbleisorte der abgeschiedenen Seele* (Berlin, 1893) p. 10.

Page 12

9. (12, 1) Lippert, *Seelenkultus*, pp. 69, 73.

10. (12, 2) This is what they do to prevent an enemy from returning. When a friend departs, to encourage his return, water is sprinkled after him (cmp. SM. p. 107).

11. (12, 3) Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda*, p. 494.

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12. (14, 1) Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda*, pp. 549 ff.

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13. (15, 1) Cf. J. Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 160.

14. (15, 2) According to a tradition in the *Talmud*, "under God's throne flows a river of fire from which on a daily basis angels are formed", E. Schwartz, *Der Ursprung der Myth.*, (Berlin, 1860), p. 70.

Page 18

15. (18, 1) Lippert, *Seelenkultus*, p. 17.

16. (18, 2) Cf. Tylor, *Anfänge der Kultur. II* (Leipzig, 1873) p. 24 ff.

17. (18, 3) Cf. Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda* p. 555.

18. (18, 4) Fr. Spiegel *Eranische Altertumskunde*, II, [Leipzig, 1873], p. 149 ff. W. Gelger, *Ostiranische Kultur im Altertum*, 1882, p. 263, 276 ff.

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19. (19, 1) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 239.

Page 20

20. (20, 1) Spiegel, *Eranische Altertumskunde*, II, p. 82, 150, 190, Geiger *Ostiran. Kultur*, p. 279.

Page 21

21. (21, 1) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 294.

22. (21, 2) Bastian, *Die Verbl. der abg. Seele*, p. 17.

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23. (23, 1) Geiger, *Ostiran. Kultur* p. 288.

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24. (25, 1) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 92; Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 129.

25. (25, 2) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 92.

26. (25, 3) Geiger, *Ostiran. Kultur*, p. 290.

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27. (26, 1) Geiger, *Ostiran. Kultur*, p. 305.

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28. (27, 1) See Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I, p. 99. As Persian loan words, *anoysh* (*anoish*)—fragrant, sweet-smelling, delicious—and the adjectival *anushak*—immortal, eternal; *anoshak kerakur* food of immortality, ambrosia. From the *Yachaxapatum* one should add *anoshak p'ar'k'*, *anoshak bargewk'*, immortal glory or splendor, immortal gifts (in paradise or the other world). In modern Armenian *anoshak* means only fragrant/delicious, however, the word "immortal (*anmahakan*)" is often used in the same

sense as *anoysh*, especially if it is based on an ancient legendary perception. For example, the "water of immortality" *anmahakan/anmahut'yan jure*" means the same as *anoysh jur*, *anmahakan/anmahut'yan hote*" is equivalent to *anoysh hot*, the "fragrance of immortality", "immortal fragrance" simultaneously signifies paradisaical or royal fragrance. Consequently, it appears that in ancient Armenian *burumn anoyshits'* meant both "a sweet fragrance" and "the fragrance of immortality", since in Classical Armenian *anoyshk'* means "paradise." Eznik (p. 210) has "...half to glory, half to insult, a group to paradise (*yanoyshs*)], and another to hell." Thus it appears that the ancient Armenians also perceived of paradise as being a fragrant place.

29. (27, 2) Cf. Geiger, *Ostiran. Kultur*, p. 277.

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30. (28, 1) Cf. the *History* of Vardan *vardapet* [Arewelts'i] (Venice, 1862), p. 10: prior to building the Tower of Babel, people go out searching for paradise, "...and after they had gone for many days, behold, they came to an expansive sea which separates it from the land."

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31. (30, 1) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 116; *Bundahishn*.

32. (30, 2) *Ibid*, p. 281.

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33. (31, 1) Cf. the *History* of Eghishe *Vardapet* (Venice, 1859), p. 40. According to Magian teaching, it was forbidden to kill beavers, foxes, and rabbits, while it was a requirement to eliminate snakes, lizards, toads, ants, and all types of crawling creatures.

34. (31, 2) Hillebrandt, *Varuna und Mitra* (Breslau, 1877, p. 27).

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35. (32, 1) Spiegel, *Iranische Altertumskunde*, III (Leipzig, 1878), p. 691.

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36. (33, 1) Cf. Spiegel, *Eran. Alt. III*, p. 697; Geiger, *Ostiran Kultur*, section 250.

Page 35

37. (35, 1) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 256 ff., 288 ff.

Page 37

38. (37, 1) From my collection from Astapat.

Page 38

39. (38, 1) Cf. Geiger, *Ostiran. Kultur*, 366 ff.

Page 39

40. (39, 1) M. Müller, *Die Wissenschaft der Sprache*, II, (Leipzig, 1893), p. 594.

Page 40

41. (40, 1) M. Müller, *Wiss. der Spr.*, II, p. 594.

Page 41

42. (41, 1) Cf. Schwartz, *Urspr. der Myth.*, p. 27 ff.

43. (41, 2) Cf. A. Kuhn, *Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks* (Berlin, 1859), p. 48 ff.

Page 43

44. (43, 1) M. Muller, *Essays*, II, 1881, p. 72; F. Schwartz, *Die Poetischen Naturanschauungen*, I, (Berlin, 1864), p. 31.

45. (46, 1) This lion, which apparently has an Iranian origin, is not widespread among the Armenians.

46. (47, 1) Cf. Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, III, p. 691.

47. (47, 2) This line is corrupt and unintelligible. Here is what is written: *Du deghin, girk' deghin* ("You yellow, book yellow"). The word "book" here is meaningless. In an entreaty to the moon, which the recorder (SHH, p. 342) called a prayer, we read

Moon, dear moon
Where do you come from?
From father Abraham, across the sea?
You are yellow
Your horse is yellow
Your beard, which has sprouted, is also yellow.

The description of the moon in this supplication is almost literally the same as in the prayer. The Apostle and Abraham apparently have been substituted for the ancient name of the sea in the air over which the moon travels.

I would like to express my thanks to Mr. G. Vants'yan, a philosophy student, for the text of this prayer.

48. (50, 1) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 318.

49. (50, 2) Cf. Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 13 ff.

50. (51, 1) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 321.

51. (51, 2) Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I, p. 115.

Page 52

52. (52, 1) Darmesteter, *Ohrmazd et Ahriman*, p. 318.

53. (52, 2) *Ibid.*, p. 318.

54. (52, 3) *Zhamanak* is a loan word from Iranian (Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I, p. 156). The term *zhuk* is rarely encountered by itself. Ordinarily it is used with the word *zhamanak* at the beginning of stories. For example: *zhukov kam zhukov kam zhamanakov...* which indicates the connection with the legendary conception of time.

55. (52, 4) Spiegel, *Eran Alt.*, II, p. 9.

Page 57

56. (57, 1) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 39, (J.) Darmesteter, *Haurvatat et Ameretat*, [*Essai sur la Mythologie de L'Avesta*, (Paris, 1875) p. 30 ff.].

Page 58

57. (58, 1) Cf. Darmesteter, *Haurvatat et Ameretat*, p. 66.

Page 62

58. (62, 1) In some districts this belief is connected with the festivals of New Year's night or Christ's baptism (AH, II, 247).

Page 63

59. (63, 1) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 39, Darmesteter, *Haurvatat et Ameretat*, p. 21.

Page 65

60. (65, 1) Compare the very similar contemporary Greek custom, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, 1892, II, *Zur neugriech Volkskunde*, von A. Thumb, III, p. 392 ff., *Der Klidonas*.

61. (65, 2) Guests are seated on a cushion.

Page 66

62. (66, 1) A symbol of marriage.

63. (66, 2) M. Müller, *Physische Religion*, p. 274.

Page 67

64. (67, 1) Geiger, *Ostiran. Kultur*, p. 254.

Page 68

65. (68, 1) Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda*, p. 568.

66. (68, 2) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, III, p. 691.

Page 69

67. (69, 1) Meyer, E. H., *Indogerm. Myth.* I. Gandharven-Kentauren, Berlin, 1883.

Page 71

68. (71,1) *Aznavurs* are also called *devs*.

69. (71, 2) Geiger, *Ostir. Kultur*, 258.

Page 72

70. (72, 1) Oldenburg, *Die Religion des Veda*, p. 488.

71. (72, 2) A. Kuhn, *Herabk. des Feuers*, p. 38, 46, ff.

Page 74

72. (74, 1) Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I, p. 194.

73. (74, 2) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 83; III, p. 707.

74. (74, 3) Cf. W. J. Mannhardt, *Antike Wald-und Feldkulte*, II T., Berline, 1877, p. 182 ff.

Page 75

75. (75, 1) Lippert, *Seelenkultus*, p. 37.

Page 76

76. (76, 1) Cf. snake-stones in Schwartz, *Poet. Naturanschauungen*, I, p. 2 ff.

Page 77

77. (77, 1) This riddle is thanks to philosophy student, G. Vants'yan.

Page 78

78. (78, 1) Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I. p. 247.

79. (78, 2) We take this and the following quotation from Alishan, p. 66. He attributes it to Shirakat'i "or someone else." Thus, the author is not certain.

Page 79

80. (79, 1) Schwartz, *Urspr. der Myth.*, p. 30 ff.

Page 80

81. (80,1) F. Schwartz, *Poetischen Naturanschauungen, II* (Berlin, 1864), p. 89.

82. (80, 2) W. Mannhardt, *Die Baumkultus der Germanen* (Berlin, 1875), pp. 69, 127 ff; *Antike Wald-und Feldkulte*, p. 94; L. Laistner, *Das Rätsel der Sphinx*, (Berlin, 1889), pp. 275, 281.

83. (80, 3) W. Mannhardt, *Germanische Mythen Forschungen* (Berlin, 1858), p. 48

ff.; *Antike Wald und Feldkulte*, p. 103.

84. (80, 4) Schwartz, *Urspr. der Myth*, p. 30, 51 ff.; *Poet Naturansch*, II, p. 164.

85. (80, 5) Schwartz, *Urspr. der Myth.*, p. 40.

86. (80, 6) Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, p. 149.

Page 81

87. (81, 1) W. Mannhardt, *Antike Wald-und Feldkulte*, p. 102.

88. (81, 2) W. Schwartz, *Indogermanischer Volksglaube* (Berlin, 1885), p. 112.

Page 82

89. (82, 1) In *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, herausgegeben von Moriz Haupt, fünfter Band, Leipzig, 1845, p. 485.

Page 83

90. (83, 1) The following may serve to show the transformations ancient legends undergo in modern times. In the vicinity of Van at the place called Hayots' Dzor folk say that Muhammad stole Christ's robe. Thunder results from the attack on the thief made by Christ and his angels.

91. (83, 2) Schwartz, *Poet. Nat. Ansch.* II, section 88.

92. (83, 3) E. H. Meyer, *Germ. Myth*, 100.

Page 86

93. (86, 1) Schwartz, *Indogerm. Volksgl.*, p. 55.

94. (86, 2) E. H. Meyer, *Germ. Myth.*, p. 216 ff.

Page 89

95. (89, 1) E. H. Meyer, *Germ. Myth.*, p. 204.

Page 90

96. (90, 1) Cf. E. H. Meyer, *Germ. Myth.*, p. 209.

Page 92

97. (92, 1) From this silence of the blacksmith has come the word *urbat'axos* which satirically designates people who speak little or not at all. An ancient Armenian book of charms is called *urbat'agirk'* and its adherents, *urbat'atesk'* or *urbat'alezk'* (AHH, p. 408).

98. (92, 2) E. H. Meyer, *Germ. Myth.*, p. 200.

Page 93

99. (93, 1) E. H. Meyer, *Indogermanische Mythen*, II, Achilles (Berlin, 1887), p. 539.

Page 94

100. (94, 1) Such is the name given to thunder at Hayots' Dzor near Van. This information was provided to me by Mr. Artashes Abeghyan, my brother's son.

Page 96

101. (96, 1) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 104.

Page 97

102. (97, 1) E. H. Meyer, *Indg. Myth.*, II, pp. 468, 527; I, p. 183.

103. (97, 2) E. H. Meyer, *Indg. Myth.*, I, p. 220; II, p. 485.

104. (97, 3) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 102.

105. (97, 4) E. H. Meyer, *Germ. Myth.*, p. 247.

Page 99

106. (99, 1) Compare modern Greek beliefs in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* (Berlin, 1892), II, p. 285 ff; A Thumb, *Zur Volkstümlichen Mantik der heutigen Griechen*.

107. (99, 2) Spiegel, *Eran. Alt.*, II, p. 103.

Page 107

108. (107, 1) Cf. the *alvar* (elf) Holderweib in travail, "Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde," 1892, II, p. 13.

Page 108

109. (108, 1) F. S. J. Krauss, *Volksglaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven* (Munster, 1890), p. 73.

110. (108, 2) This belief is old. Movses Xorenats'i relates that *vishapazu*-s (dragon-descended beings) stole the baby Artavazd and substituted a *dev* for him.

Page 109

111. (109, 1) Mannhardt, *Germ. Myth.*, pp. 42, 57 ff.

Page 111

112. (111, 1) Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I, p. 140.

113. (111, 2) Mannhardt, *Germ. Myth.*, p. 170.

Page 112

114. (112, 1) E. H. Meyer, *Indg. Myth.*, II, p. 494.

Page 119

115. (119, 1) Schwartz, *Indogerm. Volksglaube*, p. 198; Mannhardt, *Antike Wald-und Feldkulte*, I., p. 124.

Page 120

116. (120, 1) The word *Histek* probably is a corruption of the word *hishatak* ("memory," "memorial"). On that evening, as was mentioned already while discussing ancestor worship, *Hishtek* or *Hishatak* (remembrance of ancestors) is worshipped by people with incense and candles. Thus, worship of the child-delivering *Hishtek* is associated with ancestor worship. There is an Indo-Germanic belief which holds that the souls of deceased family members appear at their descendants' births, to bring help or harm.

Page 123

117. (123, 1) Schwartz, *Indogerm. Volksglaube*. See the one-eyed storm being and its evil glance.

Page 124

118. (124, 1) Cf. Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 122.

Page 125

119. (125, 1) *Vendidat*, 22, 1-6; Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 122.

120. (125, 2) Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 246.
